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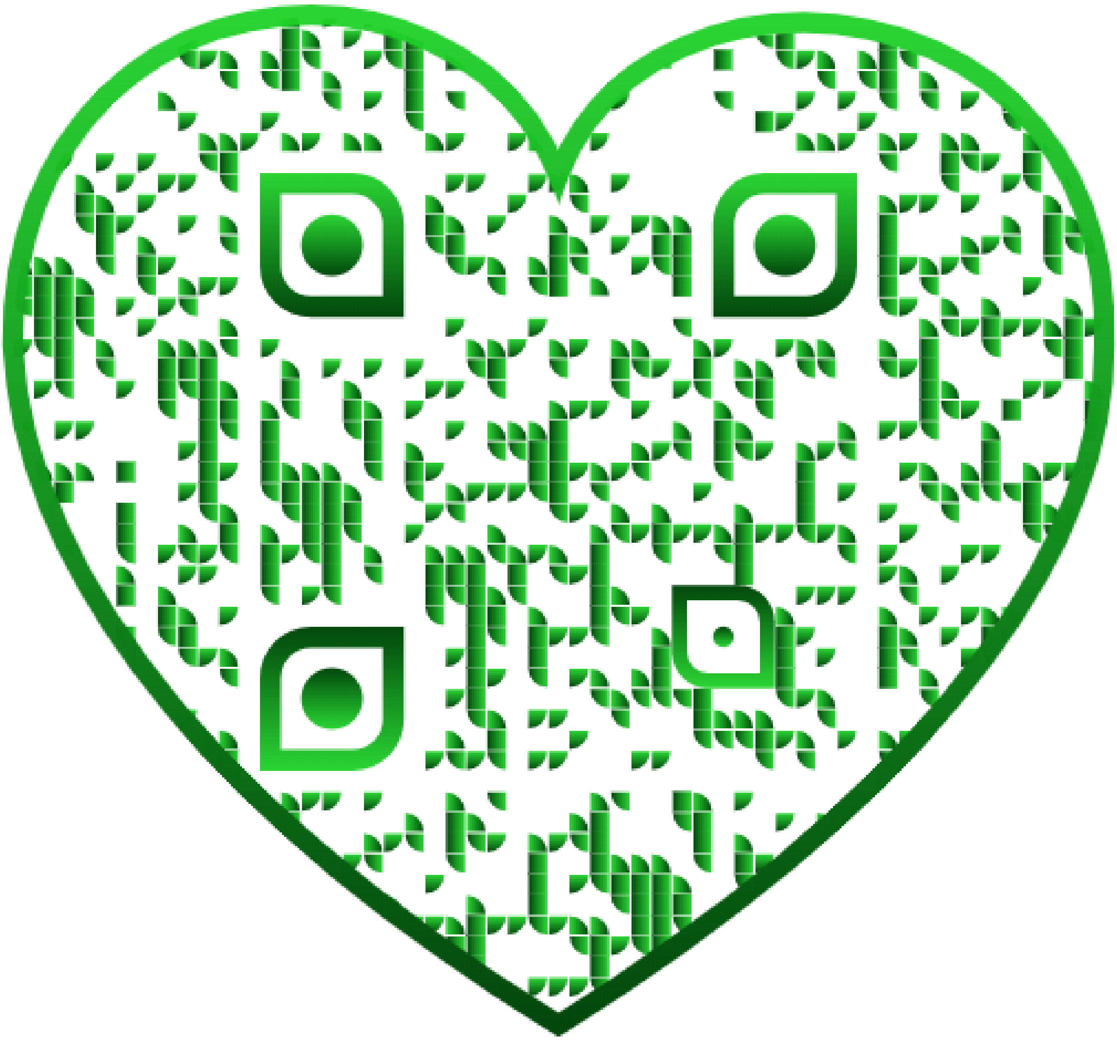

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Remarkable Rocks, Kangaroo Island © Tourism South Australia

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A place
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On the cover

Roam N Round is an adventure-loving family who tackled the 'big lap' in their 1980s caravan. This image was taken at Lake Mckenzie on K'gari. *@roam_n_round*

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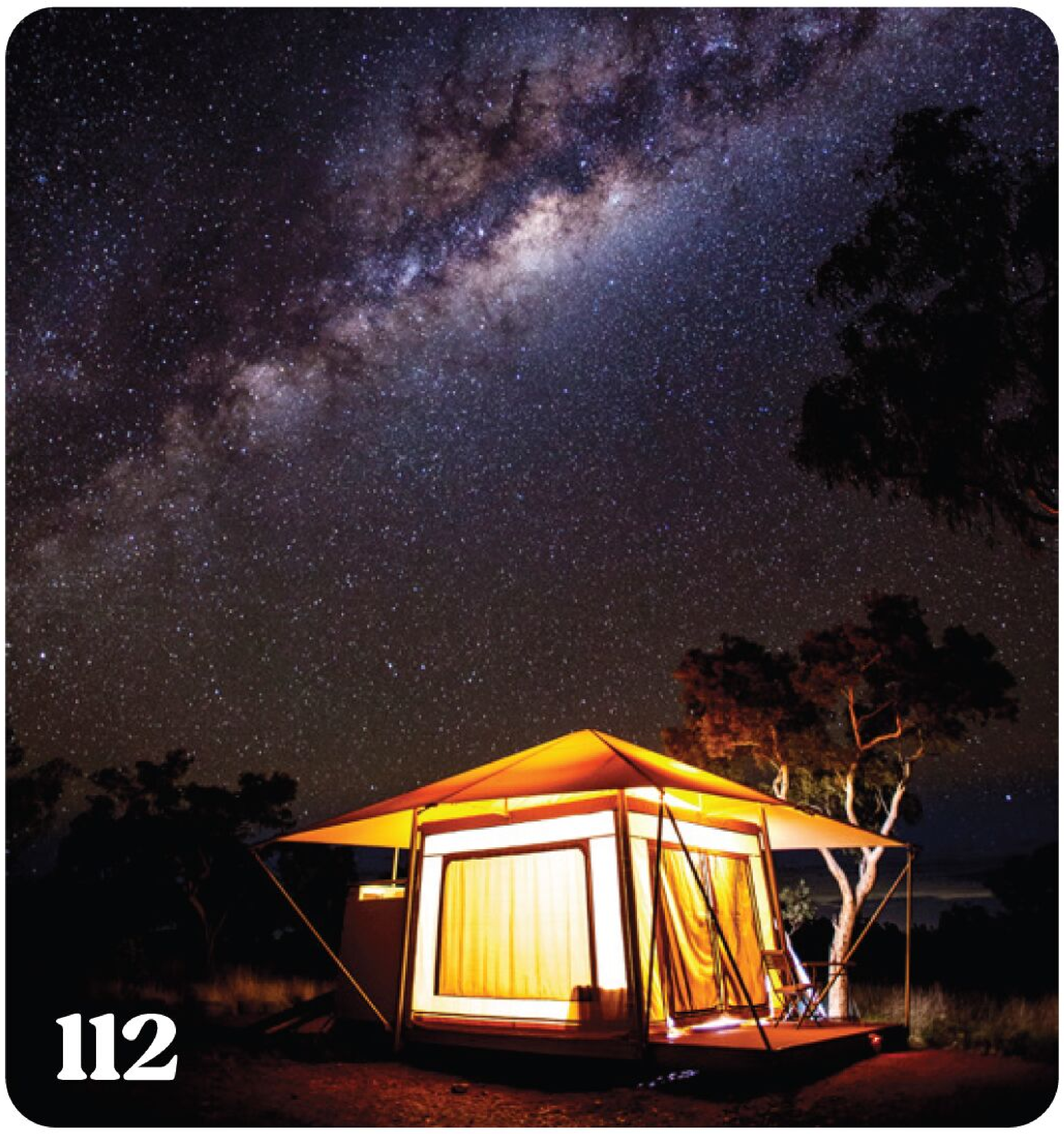

Karijini Eco Retret © Paul Pichugin

Discovery Resorts - Rottnest Island

Three Capes Track © Tourism Tasmania

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01 Curtain Fig Tree, Atherton Tablelands © Catherine Best 02 Lake McKenzie, K'gari © Courtney Atkinson/Tourism and Events Queensland 03 Seal Bay, Kangaroo Island © Yvette Loyson 04 Tram stay at BIG4 Yarra Valley Park Lane Holiday Park © Catherine Best

PARK LANE
833
04

On a recent caravanning trip, a chicken made its way onto our backseat. We were camping at an alpaca farm in Far North Queensland and, as we were leaving, my three kids smuggled the feathered stowaway, named Friendly, onto my eldest daughter's lap. I wasn't surprised. They'd spent the previous three weeks holding week-old chicks, nursing frogs, bottle feeding a lamb and chasing cane toads as we drove through outback Queensland to the tropics.

For our family, this is what camping is all about. Ditching devices and 'rewilding' in nature away from the hamster wheel of school and work. We have a no-device rule in our caravan and it's a circuit breaker that brings our family closer together, reconnecting over card games, campfires and spirited battles of Finksa.

Every family has their own camping groove, whether that's staying in a fancy glamping tent or a swag on the beach. In this issue, we provide endless inspiration to help your family find yours. Explore what camping set-up suits you best on page 100. If you're a family of newbie campers, check out the unique digs on page 88 that provide a gentle introduction to holidaying in the great outdoors.

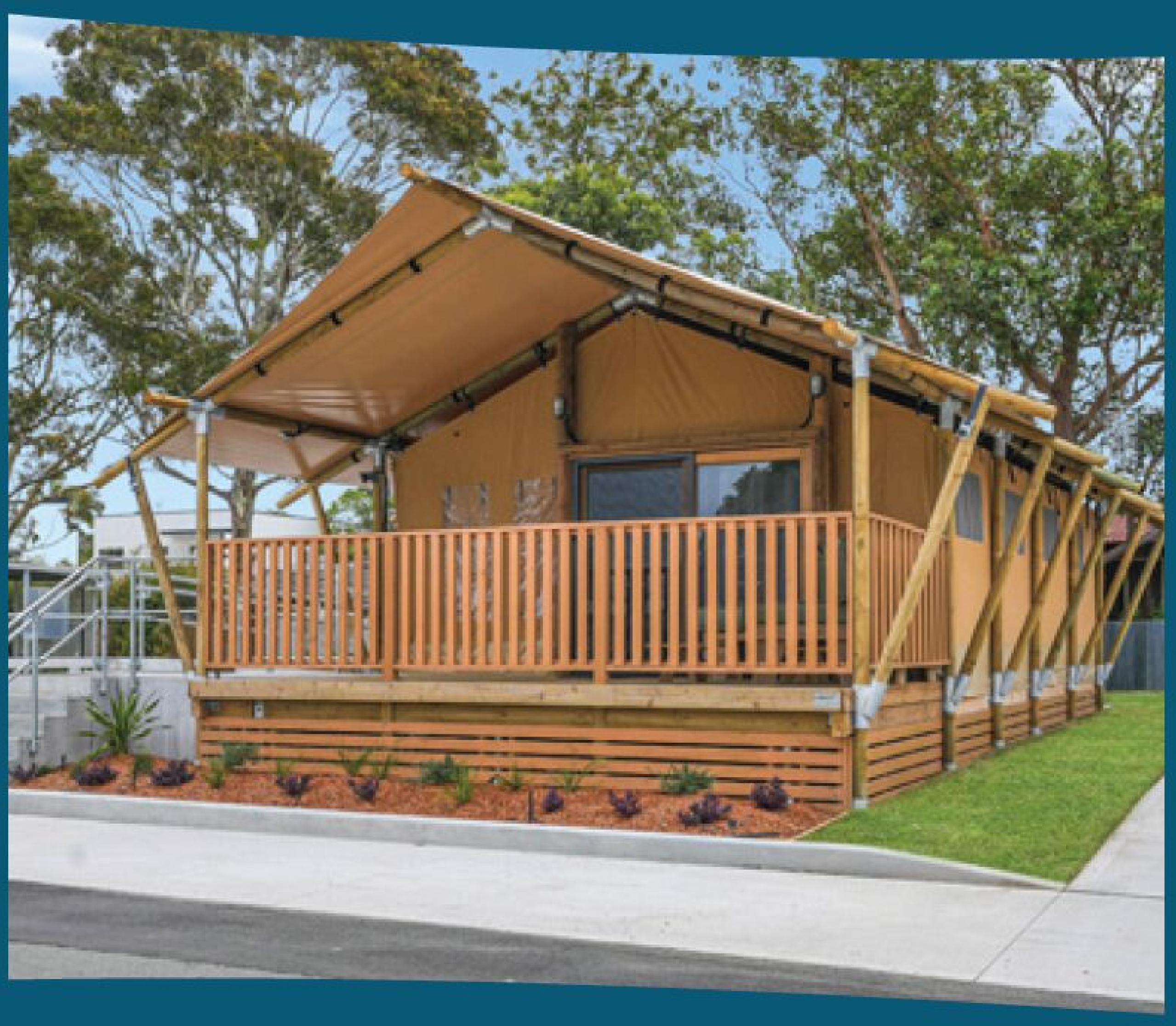
When you camp, you can venture almost anywhere. Whether that's on foot (see Lindy Alexander's multi-day hiking adventure on Tasmania's Three Capes Track on page 116), over water (check out Emma Shaw's top island camping spots on page 34), or by 4WD (Chris Stead takes us sand bashing on K'gari on page 108).

We have a round-up of Australia's greatest holiday parks in our annual Readers' Choice Awards (page 52), plus the best stargazing destinations (page 112) and pools your family will want to dive into this weekend (page 74). We also take you snow camping at the gateway to Perisher (page 42), on a spiritual journey to Uluru (page 38) and on an adrenaline-packed canyoning and snorkel jaunt in Tropical North Queensland (page 46). If that's not enough to fuel your family's wanderlust, check out our website, *holidayswithkids.com.au*.

We'll see you on the road (I'll bring the chicken).

Catherine Best

Catherine Best, *Editor*



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Meet the team

Keep an eye out for our amazing team of travel writers when you check in to your next campsite.

Megan Arkinstall

@megan_arkinstall

Megan is a freelance travel writer who is often found at the beach, bushwalking or boating with her kids. Since buying their first caravan, Megan and her family have ticked off the iconic Great Ocean Road, parked beachside in Byron Bay and rugged-up in the Snowy Mountains, which has become an annual road trip.

Chris Stead

@motivated_travel

Chris is a multi-award-winning journalist and videographer with 30 years' experience. His adventures see him driving his family of five around Australia – and the world – in pursuit of campfires, starry skies and nature, from deep in the bush and fancy holiday parks to the sands of K'gari and the peak of Kosciuszko.

Lindy Alexander

@lindyalexanderwriter

There's almost nothing travel writer Lindy Alexander wouldn't do for a story – she's squeezed into a spandex tail for mermaid lessons, climbed a Canadian waterfall and danced in an Indian wedding procession. In this issue, Lindy takes her family trekking in Tasmania. It was their first multi-day hike but it won't be their last.

BEAR
GRYLLS
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Brooke Hanson

@brookehanson_oly_oam

The golden girl of the pool, Brooke is an Olympic gold and silver medallist, motivational speaker and Apollo RV Sales ambassador. Together with her husband and three very active kids, Brooke loves creating golden family memories on the road and is especially fond of beachside holidays where the family can surf.

Eleanor Edstrom

@eleanoredstrom

Eleanor is the editorial assistant at Signature Media and believes the best stories are found off the beaten track. When she's not chasing down the perfect sentence, Eleanor is getting lost in the great outdoors (sometimes literally, though never without a smile) in search of star-studded skies and emerald coves.

Emma Shaw

@exploreshaw

Author, travel writer and content creator Emma Shaw is often on the road with her husband and two young daughters. Her new book, *Ultimate Island Escapes Australia*, shares her journey discovering 40 of the country's most wondrous islands. You can read about some of Emma's favourite camping islands in this issue.

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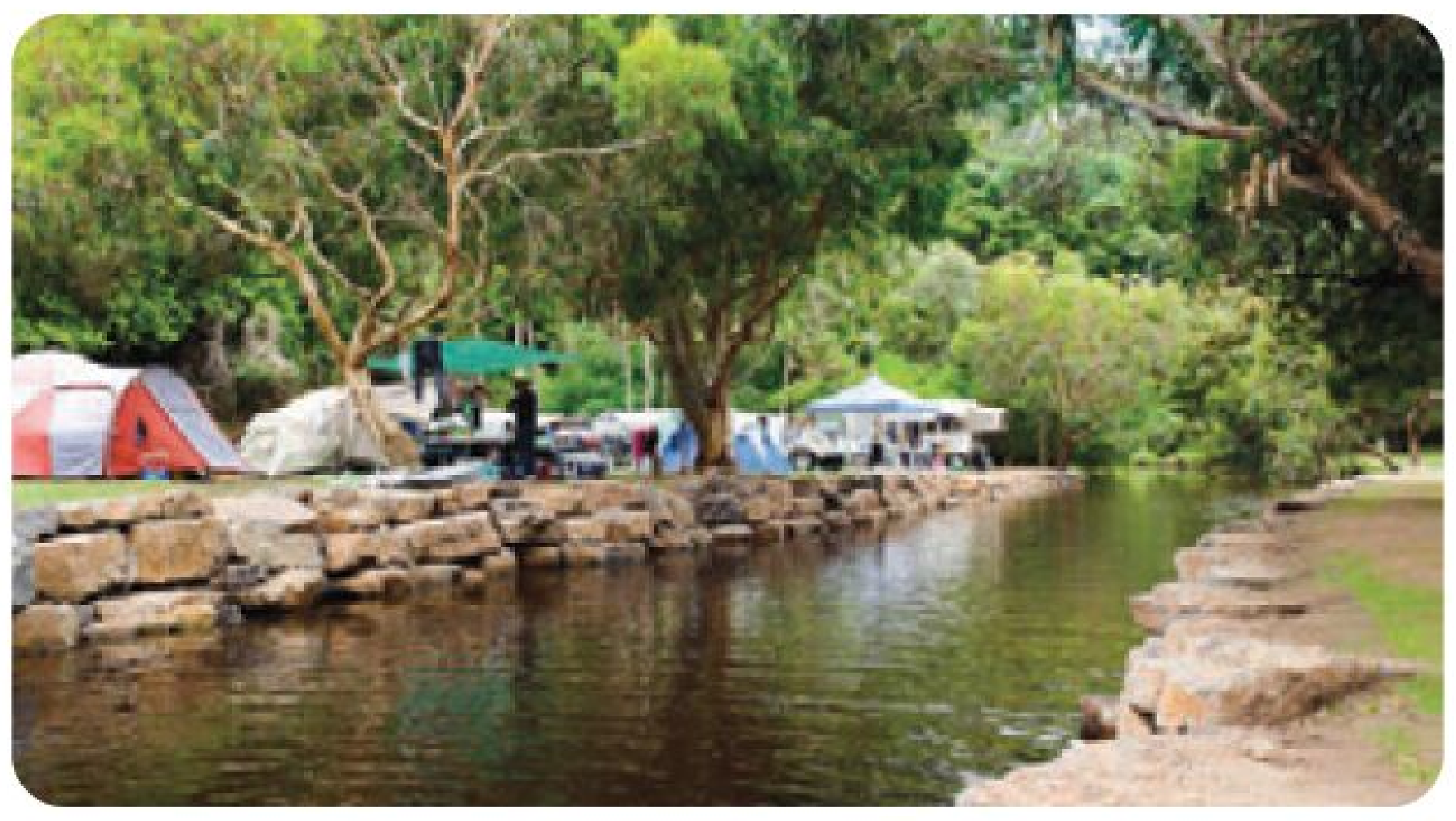

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If you'd like to receive copies, please email *cara@signaturemedia.com.au.*

Connect with us *@caravanandcampingwithkids*

We acknowledge the traditional Aboriginal custodians of the lands upon which we live, learn and work, and pay our respects to the elders both past, present and future for they hold the memories, the traditions, the culture and hopes of the First Nations of Australia.

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Gibb River Road WA

Camp envy

How's the serenity? The Steel family nabbed the perfect campsite on the banks of the Pentecost River during their 12-month lap of Australia. This free WikiCamp on the Gibb River Road in Western Australia comes with epic waterfront views backdropped by the rugged Cockburn Range. The Steels – Flick, Mitch and their kids Axton, five, Finley, three, and Madden, one – couldn't get enough of those Kimberley sunsets. We're definitely putting this campsite on our bucket list.

@the_steelys

retreat

Meet the celebrity vanners

An Olympian, radio host and children's presenter turned viral funnyman share the joys of family caravanning with Catherine Best.

02

03

01 Family adventures on the open road © Philip Schubert/Shutterstock 02 Jimmy and his clan © Jimmy Rees 03 Jimmy's boys enjoying fun in the sun © Jimmy Rees 04 North Narrabeen beach © Destination NSW 05 Brooke Hanson and family enjoying caravan life © Brooke Hanson 06 Katie Wright loving the circus life © Katie Wright

Entertainer Jimmy Rees

Jimmy Rees rose to fame as zany Jimmy Giggle on the ABC children's series *Giggle and Hoot*. It's no surprise then that his first family caravan was (coincidentally) a Road Owl. Jimmy, the YouTube sensation who spent the first decade of his career in lairy pyjamas talking to an owl puppet, says caravanning made sense once his kids came along.

"With three young boys, flying didn't seem like a user-friendly option a lot of the time," Jimmy says. "It seemed like all our friends had a van, so we thought, why not!" Joining Jimmy on his vanning adventures are his wife Tori, nine-year-old son Lenny, and twin boys, Mack and Vinny, five.

Jimmy says one of his most memorable caravanning trips was an unlikely holiday one kilometre from home back when the family was living in Narrabeen on Sydney's Northern Beaches. They packed up the caravan and Lenny, then three, and set up at a caravan park just down the road from their front door.

"We had the best time. We could have been on the other side of the country; he (Lenny) wouldn't have known," Jimmy says. "I think there is a particular vibe about a caravan park and the environment you are in when you go caravanning. [It] doesn't matter where you are, it forces you to explore, get out and about, meet new people and try different things. Even if you are only one kilometre away."

Jimmy loves the simplicity and spontaneity of caravanning and the ease of bringing the kids' belongings on the journey. "It's a mini home you take with you," he says. "It's great not having to pack and unpack your suitcase too, and the kids can keep their favourite toys with them."

Olympic gold medallist Brooke Hanson

Australian swimming legend Brooke Hanson has her grandparents to thank for her love of caravanning. The Olympic gold and silver medallist enjoyed active holidays by the water growing up, but it was Brooke's grandparents who introduced her to the vanning life.

"My grandparents always had a caravan, so I got into caravanning from a very young age. I loved the freedom it provided and the sense of adventure," Brooke says. "What I love about caravanning the most is that you make unforgettable memories every time you set up camp, and each place has so much to offer. I love the beautiful beaches, many with some of the most amazing surf breaks. I enjoy sitting around a campfire and having a good yarn and camping under the stars in the outback."

Brooke has instilled her love of caravanning and the outdoors in her husband, fellow swimmer Jared Clarke, and their three children: Cooper, 15, Billy, 11, and Matilda, nine. For the family – who are Apollo RV Sales ambassadors – getting away in the caravan is a chance to reconnect by disconnecting from the modern world.

"Holidays are so much fun, making memories no matter the weather – rain, hail or shine – each day brings a new adventure and, as a family, we cherish every moment we have together. We love nothing more than hitting the road with no plans and having quality family time doing what we love: surfing, swimming, fishing, building sandcastles, bike riding, picnics, experiencing incredible sunrises and sunsets, and enjoying the freedom of the great outdoors."

Brooke's all-time favourite caravanning destination is Crescent Head on NSW's Mid North Coast, a quaint surf town that fulfils the family's thirst for beach and surf. Read more about Brooke's top caravanning spots on page 98.

05

Radio host Katie Wright

Radio host and circus performer Katie Wright knows more about the demands of juggling kids on the road than most. The star of ABC Kids TV show *hoopla doopla!* spent a year on the road travelling with Hudsons Circus when her eldest son was six and her youngest a newborn. The family of four – fellow circus performer Jonathan Mendez (aka Bonebreaking Leo), Liam, three, and Leo, nine – relished the vagabond life, moving from town to town every week or two with their entourage.

They had two big old caravans; one was their home, the other a mobile classroom shared between eight circus-family children and a travelling teacher. Their favourite place to set up camp was by the beach, where the family could swim and build sandcastles.

“We got to see loads of different towns and cities and experience their local quirks,” says Katie, who is now a breakfast radio presenter on Power FM SA.

“We didn’t actually need that much space to survive. We were able to manage with the space that we had and coexist. We relied more on outdoor spaces and connecting with other families in the circus for time out.”

Behind the big top, where Katie would thrill with her juggling, hula hoops and acrobatics, it was a military exercise to keep the show on the road. Moving days entailed a two-hour pack-down and three-hour clean-up, and lots of foldable storage boxes for toys, clothes and grubby gumboots. Libraries and op-shops provided books and essentials on the road, and board games triumphed over screen time.

“In lots of ways the caravan was a relief from living in a regular home because it was so small… [there’s] not as much to clean up. We had to be organised,” she says.

The radio host says travelling brought her family closer together and she looks forward to one day rejoining the #vanlife community and, who knows, maybe even running away to the circus again. ●

04

Jimmy Rees’ top five camping spots

Healesville, VIC A cute little town in Victoria’s Yarra Valley with beautiful scenery and plenty of things for the kids to do.

Narrabeen, NSW If you are looking for a coastal destination in NSW, Narrabeen is awesome. The region has great beaches, a chilled-out vibe, a swimming lagoon and plenty of great areas to explore.

Bright, VIC This alpine town is a magic place in summer for swimming and tubing down the river. There’s also mountain bike riding, breweries and some other great adventures.

Yarrawonga, VIC A water-skiing destination introduced to me by my in-laws, Yarrawonga is a great place for water sports. It’s got great golf courses, and getting out on the water in summer is something special.

Lorne, VIC Victoria’s answer to Bondi, Lorne – on the Great Ocean Road – is centred around the beach. You can go for a swim and then walk around town, grab something to eat, and then pop back into the sea. The caravan parks are pretty and there is so much to see and do.

06

© BIG4 Adventure Whitsunday Resort

Gong for BIG4 Whitsundays

The BIG4 Adventure Whitsunday Resort has been inducted into the Hall of Fame after winning gold in two categories for three consecutive years at the Whitsundays Tourism Awards. The Airlie Beach park won gold in the Caravan and Holiday Parks and People's Choice Award categories and also for Excellence in Accessible Tourism. While best known for its squeal-worthy kids' facilities – not limited to an animal park and splash park with 13 waterslides – the resort also has a suite of accessible accommodation options and amenities, as well as a sensory room for children on the autism spectrum. To win a stay at BIG4 Adventure Whitsunday Resort see page 68. *adventurewhitsunday.com.au*

Island inspiration

Celebrated blogger Emma Shaw has published a new book, *Ultimate Island Escapes Australia*. The book highlights 40 must-visit isles around the country from Emma's island-hopping adventures with her husband and toddler. Inside, you'll find lots of family friendly destinations and inspiration for off-the-beaten-track adventures off the mainland. There are even some islands where you can camp. The book is a love letter to an island nation.

Published by Hardie Grant Explore, RRP $45

ULTIMATE
Island Escapes
AUSTRALIA
EMMA SHAW

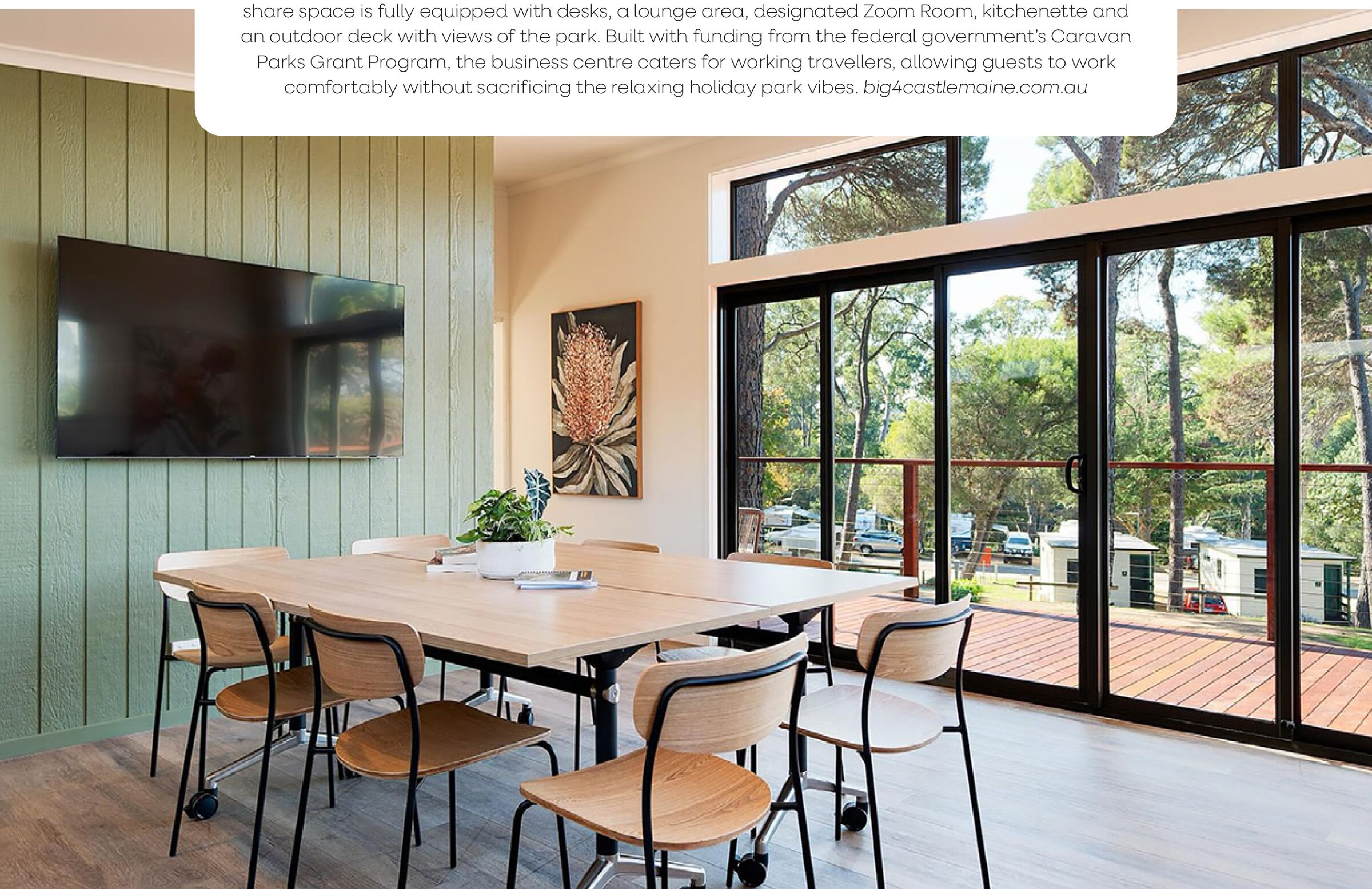
© HM Productions/BIG4 Rules Beach Holiday Park

Rules Beach park unveiled

BIG4 Rules Beach Holiday Park has opened its boom gate on the glittering shores of the Coral Sea, and she's a beauty. Located 100km north of Bundaberg, the holiday park has 14 kilometres of golden sands at its doorstep. A haven for boaters, fishers and 4WD enthusiasts, this secluded pocket of the central Queensland coast is also a hit with kids. On the beach, you'll find an infinite canvas for sandcastle building, while the rock pools, crabs, turtles and pedal carts are sure to delight. The pet-friendly park has 85 powered sites and four beachfront glamping tents, with plans afoot for more cabins and a potential cafe and splash park. *rulesbeach.com.au*

Tree-change office for BIG4 Castlemaine

BIG4 Castlemaine Gardens Holiday Park has unveiled a new 'office in the trees', enabling working parents to hit the keyboard in peace. The new Hub Workspace is available to working nomads at the park, located in Central Victoria, and the local community. Nestled in the trees, the accessible share space is fully equipped with desks, a lounge area, designated Zoom Room, kitchenette and an outdoor deck with views of the park. Built with funding from the federal government's Caravan Parks Grant Program, the business centre caters for working travellers, allowing guests to work comfortably without sacrificing the relaxing holiday park vibes. *big4castlemaine.com.au*



Pamper your pup on the Gold Coast

If you think holidaying with pets means more hassle and less freedom, think again. BIG4 Gold Coast Holiday Park is barking up the right tree with an all-new Doggy Day Care arriving in early 2025. Each lucky pup will have their own kennel, with air conditioning and a TV in the communal space (fur babies need entertainment, too!). Open daily from 9am to 5pm, the daycare service keeps the furry members of your family happy – meaning you can enjoy the Gold Coast's glorious beaches, hinterland and shopping precincts carefree. Along with a puppy pamper palace for keeping dogs squeaky clean, the park also boasts an off-leash dog park and dedicated pooch area at Nibbles Café so your four-legged pals can stay safely at your side while you eat. *goldcoastholidaypark.com.au*

© BIG4 Gold Coast Holiday Park

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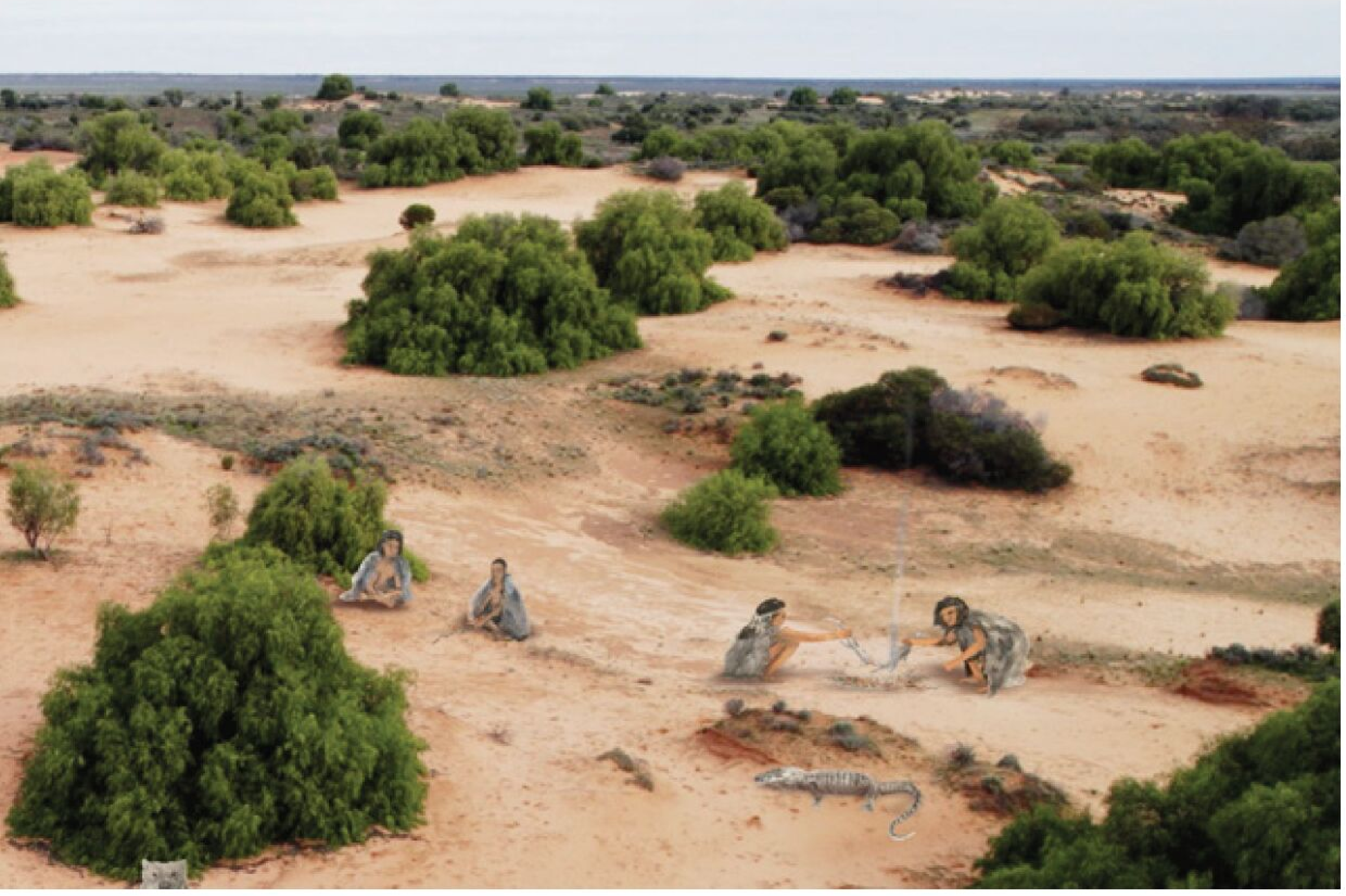


First Nations app inspires DIY discovery in Mungo National Park

A new mobile app sharing First Nations stories is helping visitors connect with culture in NSW's Mungo National Park. The free 'Mungo Stories: Walk Together' app features 10 stories narrated by traditional owners and illustrated by primary school students and a First Nations artist. Only accessible on Country, the app has in-built GPS technology that allows users to discover these stories via scannable markers throughout the national park. The app was developed by the Barkandji/Paakantyi, Mutthi Mutthi and Ngiyampaa People in partnership with Sharing Stories Foundation, NSW Parks and Wildlife Service and Mildura Primary School students. *sharingstoriesfoundation.org*

Free camping with LandaVan

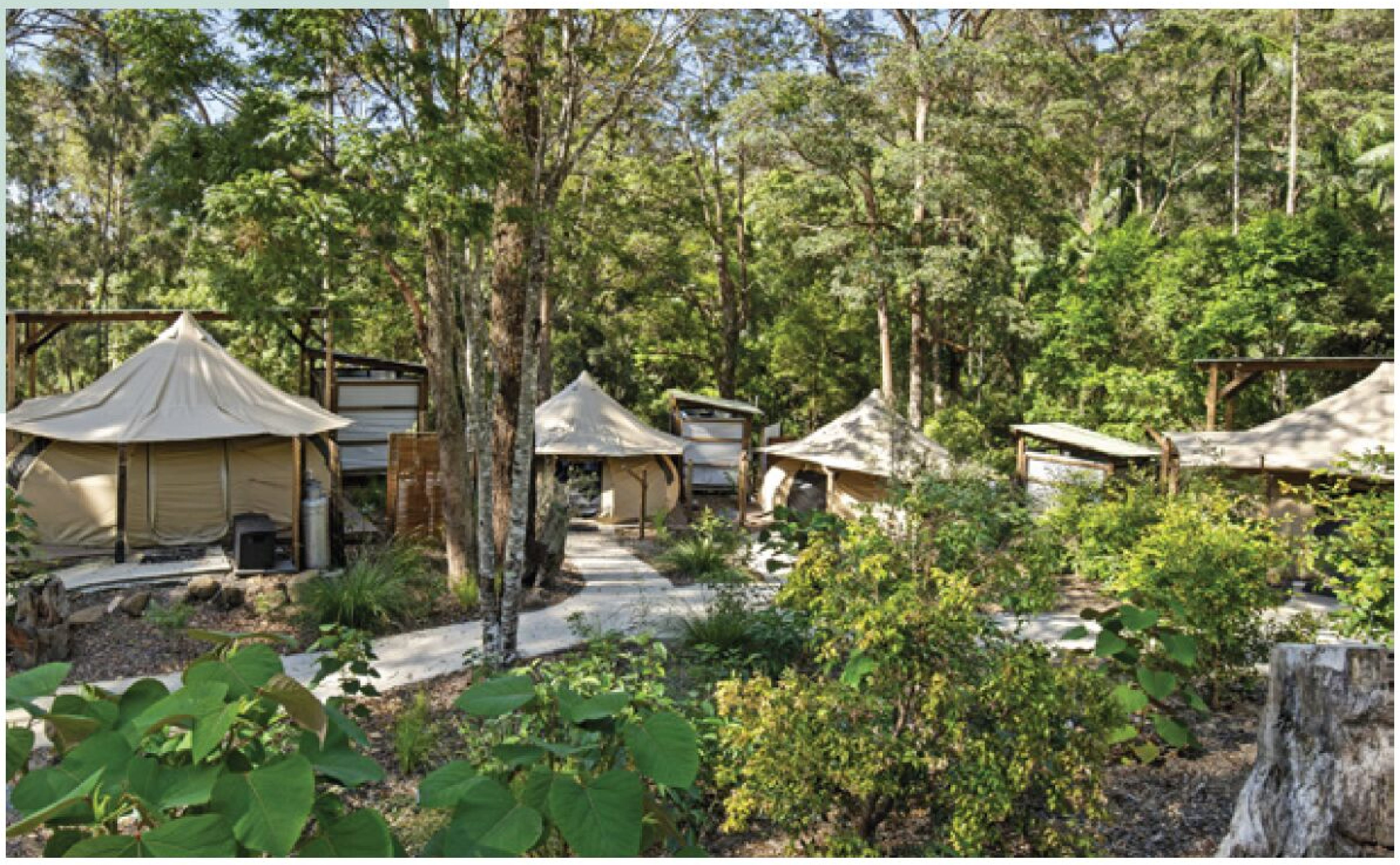
You can now camp for gratis on private property with LandaVan, which enables owners of self-contained caravans to tap into private sites around the country through a growing share community of like-minded vanners. The catch? You have to list your property too. The subscription-based platform works on a points system. Earn 200 points for every night your property is booked, which you can then redeem for a night on someone else's turf. You can even earn points (20 per night) when your site is 'available' but not booked. *landavan.com.au*

© LandaVan

SCAN ME
Breeze around Oz
Rainbow Beach
Breeze
HOLIDAY PARKS

Gold Coast hinterland property rebrands

The Gold Coast hinterland has welcomed a new holiday park to the hills – in name only. Cedar Creek Lodges and Thunderbird Park have rebranded to Mount Tamborine Glades, bringing the accommodation and attraction arms of the business under the one name. The rebrand marks 25 years since the current owners took over the property, which sprawls across 114 hectares on the banks of Cedar Creek. Mount Tamborine Glades features a raft of accommodation options, from campsites and glamping tents to lodges and luxury suites, as well as a mini-excavator park, thunderegg crystal mine, laser skirmish and a treetop adventure ropes course. A Japanese spa is planned for 2025. *tamborinemountainglades.com.au*



© Mount Tamborine Glades

© D. Parsons/Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water

Trail love

Gear up and head for the hills, as a new four-day walking track has opened in NSW's Kosciuszko National Park. The breathtaking Snowies Alpine Walk is a 56km route through sub-alpine wildflower meadows and glacier-sculpted landscapes to Australia's highest peak. It then descends to Bullocks Flat, passing iconic alpine hotspots such as the Snowy River and Blue Lake. Come nightfall, walkers can rest and refuel at lodge accommodation within the national park, or in the villages of Jindabyne, Guthegra, Thredbo, Perisher or Charlotte Pass. Whether you tackle the trail guided or self-guided, the experience is one for the books. *nationalparks.nsw.gov.au*

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K'gari lights up

It starts with a canopy of stars falling from the heavens and ends with the rainforest glowing luminous after fire. Introducing *Illumina*, the newest attraction on K'gari (formerly Fraser Island). Billed as the first permanent light show installation in Queensland, *Illumina* tells the creation story and evolution of K'gari – the world's largest sand island and a UNESCO World Heritage site. Produced by light artist Bruce Ramus, the 20-minute show, 'Return to Sky', is beamed above a lake in the grounds of Kingfisher Bay Resort. *illuminakgari.com.au*

© Illumina

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Luxe villas shine bright

The Victorian hamlet of Bright has welcomed four new Luxury Alpine Villas at Tasman Holiday Parks. Set among mountaintops, fields of wildflowers and mighty waterfalls, the one-bedroom villas allow guests to unwind and reconnect with nature. Blending seamlessly into the environment, this stylish retreat is a fantastic base from which to meander along serene riverbanks, tackle picturesque hiking trails and shred dirt on the region's mountain bike tracks. Lazy mornings can be spent snuggled on the lounge in front of a cosy fireplace, immersed in an elegant interior. *tasmanholidayparks.com*

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Big tractor unveiled in WA

Australia has its fair share of big things – banana, pineapple, prawn, spud – and can now add a tractor to its list of super-sized attractions. And not just any tractor: the world's biggest. Unveiled in the rural Western Australian town of Carnamah, 300 kilometres north of Perth, the Big Tractor is another excuse for families to venture beyond the state's capital. The tangerine behemoth is more than 11 metres tall and 16 metres long and is made from 42 tonnes of steel. A replica of the first tractor manufactured in WA in 1949, the Chamberlain 40K, the Big Tractor is five times bigger than the original. Stop by Carnamah to see the attraction. *westernaustralia.com*

TAWKING CHANGE

Travelling Australia With Kids is expanding its reach after a change of ownership. The popular TAWK community, which enables members to unlock free stays at holiday parks around Australia, was taken over by husband-and-wife team Tara and Lucas Hay in March 2024. The couple, together with Tara's sister Chelsey Wight, are set to launch a TAWK app that will make accessing member discounts even easier. TAWK has been running for 13 years and gives members two nights of free kids' camping at more than 180 holiday parks around Australia, as well as discounts at select attractions and accommodations. *travellingaustraliawithkids.com*

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JAYCO REVEALS WINNERS

Australia's largest caravan manufacturer, Jayco, has announced its Greatest Escapes 2024 award winners, celebrating the country's finest caravan and camping destinations. This year, BIG4 Gold Coast Holiday Park, QLD, took out the top gong and the Best Family Holiday Park award, mirroring its success in the *Caravan & Camping with Kids* Best Holiday Park Awards 2024. Crescent Head Holiday Park, NSW, won the People's Choice Award. The overall winner picked up a $10,000 prize, courtesy of Jayco and Gervale Homes, to go towards park upgrades. *jaycogreatestescapes.com.au*

© BIG4 Pisces Apollo Bay Holiday Park

Rain-proof fun for BIG4 Apollo Bay

Families no longer need to worry about Victoria's fickle weather dampening their holiday at BIG4 Pisces Apollo Bay Holiday Park, which has a new activities hub. Opening in 2025, the self-sufficient Nautilus building takes on-site activities under cover, thanks to funding from the federal government's Caravan Parks Grant Program. The venue will host a range of activities, including yoga sessions, a kids' club and live music performances throughout the year. Nautilus will also be used as a social and educational hub for reptile, science and magic shows. *big4apollobay.com.au*

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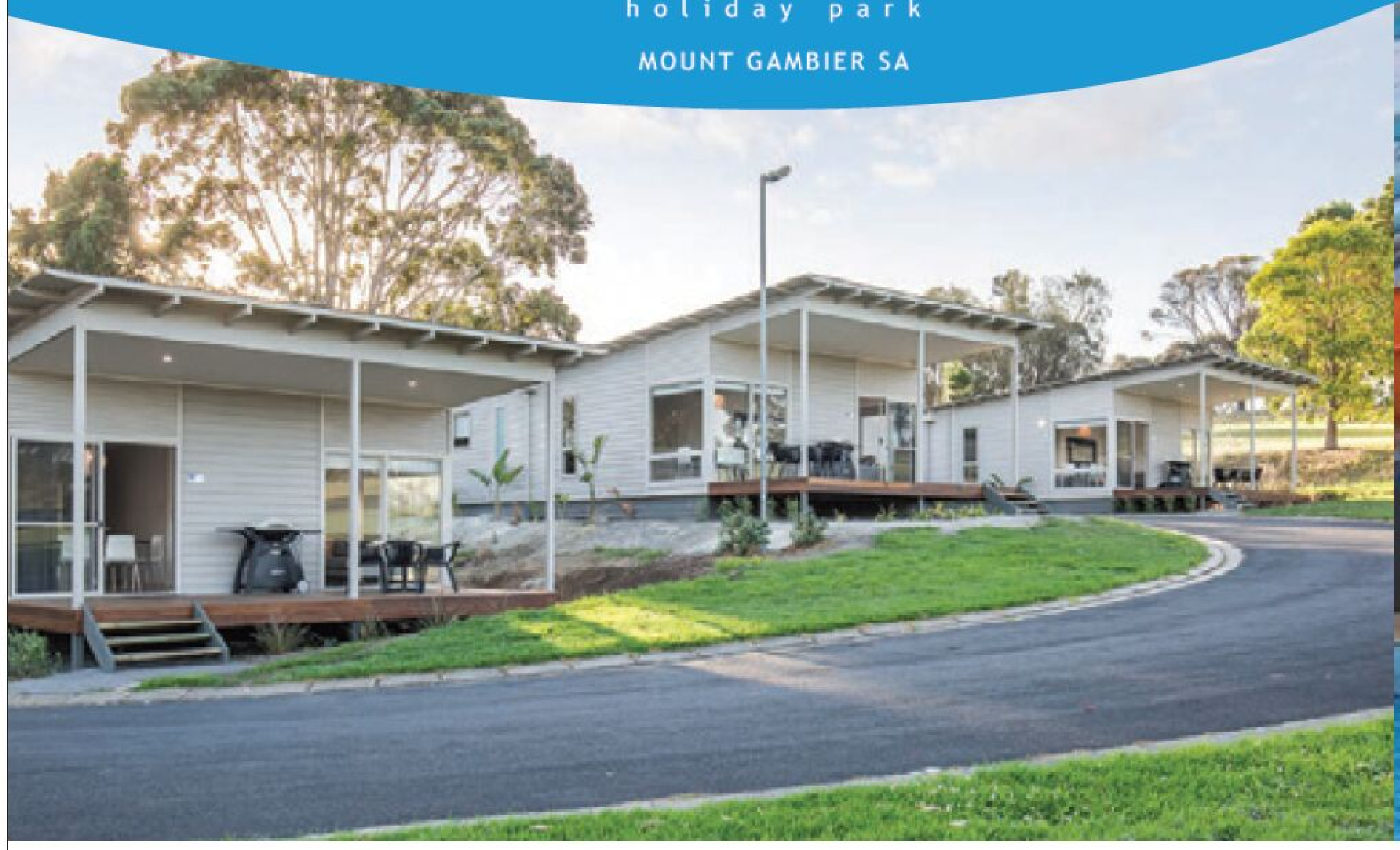

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Located next door to the world famous Blue Lake in Mount Gambier, South Australia, Blue Lake Holiday Park offers a range of accommodation to suit everyone, from luxurious villas and cabins to caravan and camping sites. Plus, there is now a brand new indoor heated pool and waterslides. Other facilities include a playground, jumping pillow, games room, new cafe, camp kitchen and tennis court. And dogs are welcome too!

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Photo captured by Rileys Travels

01

02

01 Lemon Myrtle Fragrances' repellent is great for sensitive skin © Shutterstock 02 The range includes products for body and home

Wild scents make sense

Plant-based, Australian-made and free from artificial nasties, Lemon Myrtle Fragrances keeps the whole family clean and revitalised while on the go.

Ah, the great outdoors – where the air is pure, the campfire crackles, and dirt and sweat have an uncanny knack for clinging to your little ones long after the day's activities are over. While camping adventures create priceless memories, they can also leave your family battling unpleasant bacteria (not the kind of 'souvenir' I'd like to take home, thanks). Enter Lemon Myrtle Fragrances, your secret weapon in the wilderness. The family run business has been providing sustainably sourced, Aussie-made body and home care products for more than 25 years. Ideal for wiping away the day's grime or freshening up the caravan, these natural products are a must-have for any family foray in nature.

Ranging from cleansing skin care, loose leaf tea and natural toothpaste to sanitisers and insect repellents, the extensive range harnesses the natural benefits of lemon myrtle. A much-loved flowering plant native to the Australian east coast, lemon myrtle is prized for its antibacterial, antimicrobial and antifungal properties. It's also rich in vitamin A, E, zinc and calcium, and has a delightful zesty scent. Better still, Lemon Myrtle Fragrances don't use any parabens, animal by-products or artificial fragrances and additives – meaning they're safe for every member of the family, even the pint-sized ones.

After a day spent exploring bush trails or playing by the creek, a quick rinse with the soothing body wash or multipurpose soap bar brings an instant burst of freshness. No need to worry about the lingering smells of sunscreen or chlorine. As for your four-legged companions, the pet soap ensures that your furry friends stay sparkly clean, too.

The nourishing shampoo and conditioner work wonders on salty scalps, while the moisturising body lotion gently soothes dry and irritated skin after a day of sun exposure. And for damp gear or musty tents, a spritz of lemon myrtle air freshener will quickly neutralise any unwanted odours, leaving a light, citrusy fragrance. Roughing it never smelled so good! The deodorant offers the same uplifting scent with long-lasting protection – ideal for keeping you feeling fresh even when you're far from a hot shower.

Whether you're at home or hitting the road, Lemon Myrtle Fragrances offers versatile natural solutions for families looking to stay clean and comfy without the harsh chemicals. The best part? The products come in handy travel-friendly sets so you can enjoy the benefits of this powerful Aussie ingredient wherever your adventures take you.

lemonmyrtlefragrances.com.au ●

Explore

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Uluru's new light spectacular

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Snow holidays done cheap

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Water thrills in Cairns

© Tourism Tropical North Queensland

island
life

Island dreaming

For the ultimate 'overseas' family holiday, pack up the kids, jump on a ferry and set up camp on an island. Australia has lots to choose from and these are six of the best, writes Emma Shaw.

Dirk Hartog Island WA

Why we love it Get off the beaten track and explore the wild, untouched territory of Dirk Hartog Island in World Heritage-listed Shark Bay. With nesting turtles (in season), manta rays, sharks and whales passing by in winter, Dirk Hartog has an incredible marine environment. Swim, snorkel and make sure you experience Australia's last sunset of the day on the western clifftops of the island.

Getting there The *Hartog Explorer* barge transfers 4WDs (and small trailers) to the island from Steep Point on the mainland.

The gear ⛺ 🚐

You'll need to bring everything with you for your stay on Dirk Hartog Island. The Homestead Camping Grounds offer plenty of amenities, including fresh drinking water, hot showers, toilets and a camp kitchen. Beyond the homestead, there are nine national park campgrounds scattered across the island but you will need to bring your own supplies (including a toilet at some sites) and leave your campsite exactly as you found it. *dirkhartogisland.com.au*
exploreparks.dbca.wa.gov.au

03

01 Picnics are epic on Dirk Hartog Island © Emma Shaw 02 How's the serenity on K'gari? © Emma Shaw 03 Rock formations of Flinders Chase National Park, Kangaroo Island © Tourism South Australia 04 Beaches all to yourself on North Stradbroke Island © Emma Shaw 05 Meet the locals on Fitzroy Island © Emma Shaw 06 Glamping tents are family friendly on Rottnest Island © Emma Shaw

Kangaroo Island SA

Why we love it With rugged natural beauty, spectacular beaches, incredible wildlife encounters and stunning rock formations at Flinders Chase National Park, plus a thriving food and wine scene, KI really has it all. Visit the sea lion colony at Seal Bay Conservation Park, go sand boarding at Little Sahara, swim with dolphins from Emu Bay and have a barbecue on the beach at sunset.

Getting there SeaLink operates a regular 40-minute ferry service between Cape Jervis on the Fleurieu Peninsula and Penneshaw on KI.

The gear

There are 12 council-run and national park campgrounds across the island offering stays in scenic locations, as well as a couple of caravan parks. Book your site in advance to avoid missing out. *kangarooisland.sa.gov.au parks.sa.gov.au sealink.com.au*

Rottnest Island WA

Why we love it An island of 63 beaches, bicycles and big sunsets that's also home to the happiest animal on Earth – the ever-smiling quokka – Rotto has so much to love. With two lighthouses, a heritage train, shipwrecks and WWII tunnels, there are plenty of activities to keep kids of all ages entertained.

Getting there Various ferry operators service Rotto, getting you there in 30 minutes from Fremantle, or 90 minutes from Perth's CBD. Foot passengers only (there are no cars on Rotto).

The gear

The campground on Rottnest Island offers non-powered sandy campsites for tent camping only. You'll need to bring your own gear but there's a communal camp kitchen, barbecues, toilet facilities and a general store and cafes nearby. For something a bit more luxe, check in to a glamping tent next door at Discovery Resorts – Rottnest Island. *rottnestisland.com discoveryholidayparks.com.au*

02

K'gari QLD

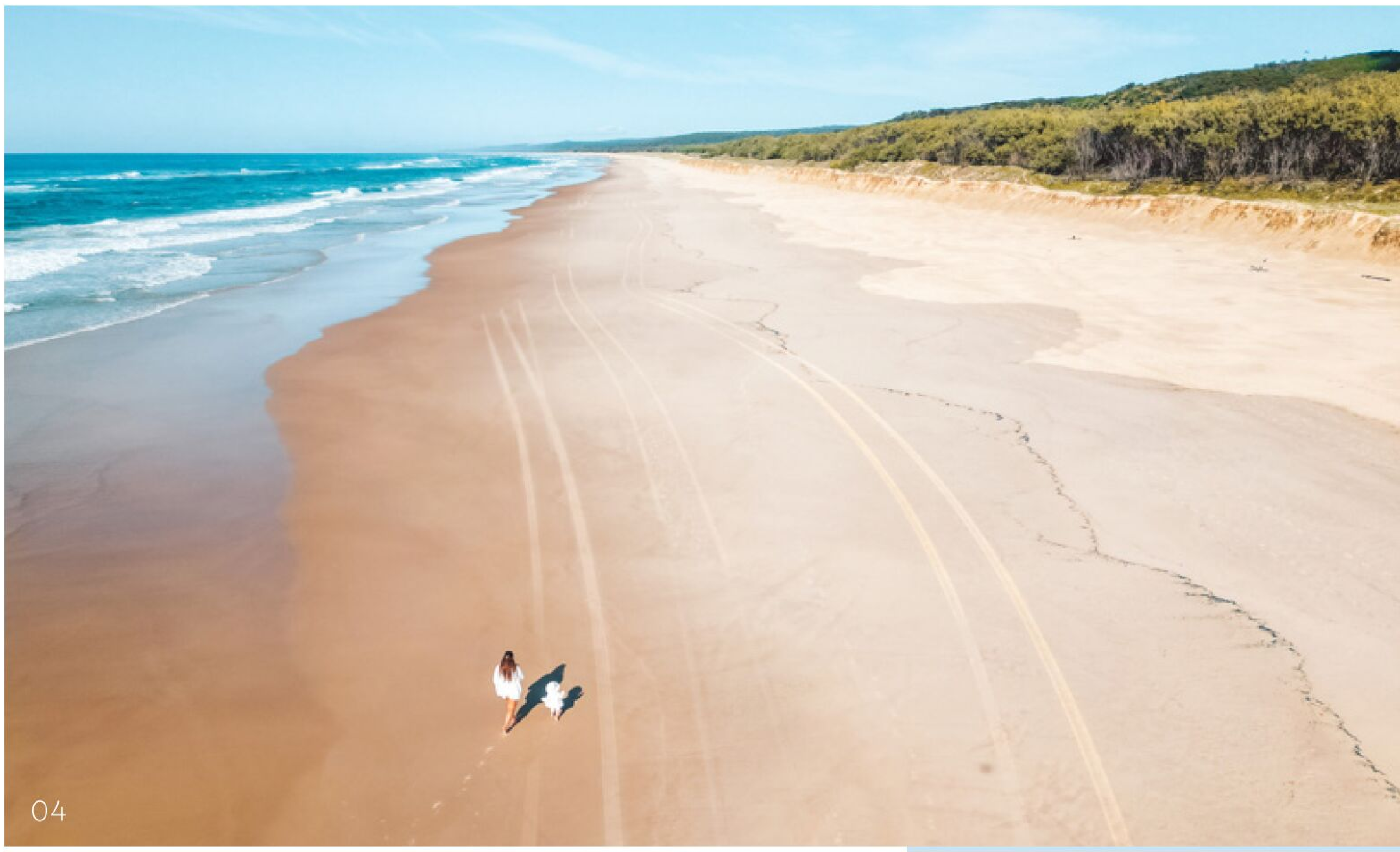
Why we love it The largest sand island in the world, K'gari is one of Australia's most unique isles and offers remote bush and beach camping. There are lush rainforests, coloured sand cliffs, stunning perched lakes and miles of deserted beaches to explore. Camp right on the beach, where you'll fall asleep to crashing waves and wake up to the sunrise.

Getting there Take the Mantaray Barge which drops you and your vehicle at Hook Point on the southernmost tip of the island after a 10-minute trip from Inskip Point.

The gear

You'll need a vehicle access permit and a campground booking for your stay. While there are some campgrounds accessible to caravans and trailers, many are only suitable for tents. The sand can be very soft further north on the island and the inland tracks are very narrow and rutted. *frasercoast.com parks.desi.qld.gov.au mantarayfraserislandbarge.com.au*

For more on K'gari, see page 108.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05

> “Fitzroy Island is one of the few destinations where you can roll out of your tent and straight into the ocean to snorkel with turtles”

06

Fitzroy Island QLD

Why we love it A unique opportunity to camp right on the shores of the Great Barrier Reef, Fitzroy Island is one of the few destinations where you can roll out of your tent and straight into the ocean to snorkel with turtles and explore colourful coral gardens. This is rustic camping at its best. Don’t miss the turtle rehabilitation centre and Nudey Beach.

Getting there The Fitzroy Flyer will get you to the island from Cairns in 45 minutes (no vehicles).

The gear ⛺

Fitzroy Island Camping offers grassy tent sites and basic amenities with cold showers. You will need to bring all your camping gear with you or hire a camping pack from the resort. Foxy’s Bar & Restaurant will satisfy any hot chip and ice cream cravings. *fitzroyisland.com* *fitzroyislandferry.com*

North Stradbroke Island QLD

Why we love it Wake up with the whales at a camp spot right on the beach on North Stradbroke Island (Minjerribah). With spectacular sunsets, an abundance of wildlife, proud First Nations culture and plenty of beaches to drive on, Straddie is an ideal destination to unwind and escape into nature. Don’t miss the Gorge Walk at Point Lookout where the kids can spot grazing kangaroos.

Getting there SeaLink connects North Stradbroke Island to Cleveland on the outskirts of Brisbane in 45 minutes.

The gear 🚐 🚌 ⛺ 🚙

Minjerribah Camping has six beachfront campgrounds across the island. Some are only accessible by 4WD but others are suitable for caravans and motorhomes. Camping fees apply and can be booked online. *stradbrokeisland.com* *minjerribahcamping.com.au* *sealink.com.au*

Emma Shaw is the author of Ultimate Island Escapes Australia. ●

01

Rock of all ages

At Uluru, an ancient wonder has undergone a modern-day reinvention that's captivating audiences young and old, writes Catherine Best.

"Swallow quickly so they don't bite you!" I tease, as my daughter studies the green ants embedded in her custard tart. Amelie frowns, gingerly pushing a tiny morsel of citrus-green custard onto the tip of her tongue. Down it goes, without so much as a whimper – from insect or child. "I just ate an ant!" she shrieks. "And I didn't even taste it!"

It's our first full day at Uluru – the spiritual and geographic heart of Australia – and already the kid is yielding to the rhythm of the outback. At home, dinner is a meat-and-three-veg drill, with the ping of a device never far from earshot. Here, swept above the ochre dunes with Uluru as a backdrop, it's a sensorial spectacular. The evening began with canapes and cocktails at sunset, segued into a gourmet picnic beneath the first twinkle of stars, and is about to climax with Wintjiri Wiru – a sound, light and drone show tens of thousands of years in the making.

We snuggle under a blanket as 1,200 drones swarm the night sky, desert oaks burst into flames and the dunes ripple beneath a sea of pulsing light. Clapping sticks keep the beat to a chorus of singing voices, and suddenly an evil spirit dog snarls from the heavens. Wintjiri Wiru is one heck of a bedtime story. The world's largest permanent drone show brings to life the Mala story, an important creation story for the Anangu traditional owners. We will learn more about it at the base of Uluru in coming days, but no lesson resonates more with kids than one told in animation.

03

04

Green card

- *Recycling*
- *Solar power*

Rocks of wonder

Some moments require no special effects at all, like huddling in the inky pre-dawn to watch UNESCO World Heritage-listed Uluru and Kata-Tjuta blush with the first rays of daylight. Even Amelie, 13 years old and embracing the teenage sleep-in, takes the cold, early starts in her stride. At Kata-Tjuta, meaning 'many heads' in Pitjantjatjara language, we're amazed to discover some of the 36 domes are almost 200 metres taller than Uluru. We leave the sunrise viewing area before the crowds so we can see two of the tallest domes, at Walpa Gorge, at first light. The carpark is empty and we have the entire gorge to ourselves as we walk between the domes, just as the sun grazes their tops.

At Uluru, we time our base walk immediately after sunrise when most of the resort village is still sleeping. Nothing prepares you for the sheer size and grandeur of our most-famous landmark, and Amelie and I both fall into silent, mouth-gaping reverence staring up at the colossal rock. We set off at the Mala Walk car park, following the 10 kilometre trail left around the base (walkers clockwise, cyclists anti-clockwise). The first kilometre takes a long time because there's so much to explore – bush foods, caves, rock art and Tjukurpa (ancient creation stories). We soon get into a rhythm and are fascinated by the changing faces of the rock. Far from a homogenous 348-metre-tall lump in the desert, Uluru is creased, honeycombed and pockmarked with caves; its pleats secreting water holes, shaded woodlands and even butterflies.

We pause for a drink, braving a squadron of insects as we lift our fly nets (the first frost of winter will kill them off). "Look, doesn't that look like a kangaroo?" I remark, pointing to the termite-like markings nibbled into the sandstone. "Nah," Amelie responds. "It's more like a T-rex."

Paint and ponder

The landscapes here supercharge the imagination, providing inspiration for Australia's first artists for more than 30,000 years. One morning, we join a dot-painting workshop run by Maruku Arts. An Anangu artist draws three concentric circles in the dirt – representing Uluru, Kata-Tjuta and Artilla (Mount Conner) – and explains (through an interpreter) how painting is

01 Light spindles illuminate the desert at Field of Light © Tourism NT/Ray Reyes 02 Sunrise viewing at Uluru © Shaana McNaught/Tourism NT 03 Wintjiri Wiru drone show over Uluru © Joshua Griffen/Tourism NT. As custodians of the land, Anangu hold the Mala story from Kaltukatjara to Uluru. To share their story, RAMUS designed and produced an artistic platform using drones, light and sound to create an immersive storytelling experience 04 Guide Ganiva Drew finding bush tucker 05 Artwork done with help from Maruku Arts © Catherine Best 06 Walpa Gorge, home to two of Kata-Tjuta's tallest domes © Jason Ierace/Tourism NT

05

06

a form of storytelling, and the meaning behind the symbols. A circle represents a campfire, waterhole or meeting place, short arrows are emu tracks, and lines are walking journeys that double as "corridors of information and knowledge". After the demonstration, we're invited to create an artwork that tells our own story. Hunching over canvas, we dab brushes and wooden skewers into paint, using symbols and dots to illustrate our journey to Central Australia. When our paintings are complete, the group brings them all together and is invited to share the story behind their artwork.

Ayers Rock Resort, encompassing five hotels and a campground in the gateway town of Yulara, hosts a range of free daily tours and activities. We join a guided garden walk and bush yarns session, learning about hunting tools used by Anangu men and how the women transported water and foraged food on their heads. Guide Ganiva Drew explains how the women would walk great distances balancing piti bowls carved from river red gums, held in place with a manguri (head ring), made from spinifex and human hair. We hear how the Anangu read the land for its resources; learning when to pick native figs, why desert grevillea flowers are known as 'outback lollypops', and how blue mallee seeds can be ground into a peanut butter-like paste.

Twinkle twinkle...

Yulara is also a gateway to the extra-terrestrial. After sundown, we join an Outback Sky Journeys astronomy tour (kids under 15 are free) for a night gazing at the cosmos. Our guide Luke – "you can call me Luke Skytalker, if you like" – explains how the universe began more than 13 billion years ago, with hydrogen clusters forming the first stars. Using a laser pointer, he traces the southern cross, explaining how the Anangu see the constellation as a quandong tree (native peach), and how when it's low on the horizon, the fruit is ready to pick. We peer through a deep-space telescope at the 'jewel box' cluster of stars and learn mind-boggling facts, like there are 10,000 stars for every grain of sand on Earth. Another night, we experience Field of Light – 50,000 light spindles illuminating a desert expanse the size of seven football fields. Mind still boggled.

On our last day, the heavens open and rain spatters the parched earth. At Uluru the waterholes are full and rivulets trickle down creases in the rock. The red dirt on our shoes turns to russet mud, but we feel cleansed. Rain brings life to the desert and a fresh bounty of bush tucker. Next time, we'll have to try witchetty grubs.

Camp it

Ayers Rock Campground is about five kilometres from the entrance to Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park. The campground has 590 powered and unpowered campsites and 14 self-contained two-bedroom cabins. ●

Do your homework

ayersrockresort.com.au
maruku.com.au
parksaustralia.gov.au

01

Just add snow

Hitting the slopes is more affordable when you BYO caravan, as Megan Arkinstall discovers on a family adventure to Jindabyne, the gateway to Perisher.

Light is seeping through the shutters of our caravan window. I peer out with anticipation; it's another magical blue-sky day. Across from our site, mist hangs over the glass-like waters of Lake Jindabyne, which is bathed in the warm glow of the rising sun.

The grass is crunchy underfoot and car windows have turned white. The temperature dropped to -10°C overnight and everything is covered in a layer of frost. But despite the sub-zero conditions and our initial reservations about camping in the New South Wales Snowy Mountains, we are toasty in our cosy caravan.

We eat breakfast in the van and I take the short walk across the road to the town centre for caffeine. It's so bitterly cold my gloveless fingers begin to ache. I warm them up in front of the fire at Nimmitabel Bakery as the barista feverishly churns out coffee for customers like me, geared up for a day on the mountain.

On the slopes

Jindabyne is an easy 30-minute drive from Perisher Ski Resort and a thrifty off-mountain option for camping families. We spend the next few days at Smiggin Holes, renowned for its green and blue beginner runs and family friendly areas. Despite being our third trip with our now seven and four-year-old boys, the thrill of spotting snow as we wind our way up the mountain never gets old – and sharing their excitement is one of the best feelings as a parent.

Together with our extended family, we spend hours racing toboggans, throwing snowballs in the free-play area and tag-teaming the kids – my husband hitting the slopes while I take our sons to the magic carpet area, and vice versa. With little fear, the kids ride and fall down the gentle slopes again and again, swapping their snowboards and skis to test out which they enjoy better (skis win). When it's my turn to head up the mountain, I'm blessed with another bluebird day and surprisingly short lines for the lifts. I lose count of how many runs I do and, once I've got my rhythm, find the relatively uncrowded trails exhilarating.

Warming up

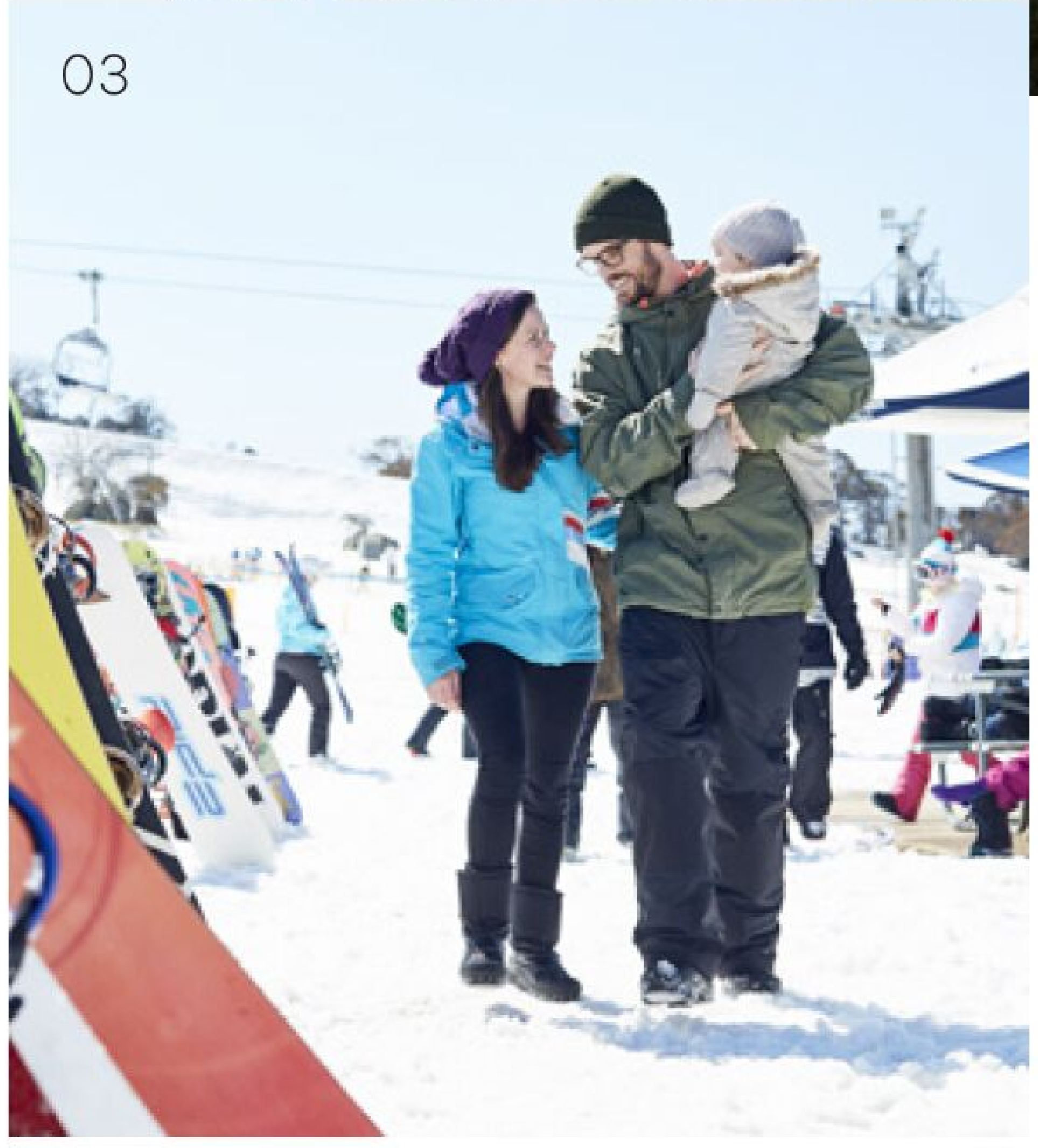
After a long day on the ski fields, there's nothing more satisfying than a hot shower. We're staying at NRMA Jindabyne Holiday Park and the amenities are spacious with good water pressure, so we opt to use the facilities over our caravan shower. Afterwards, while the kids have fun with their cousins at the park across from our site, my husband and I rug up on camp chairs with a glass of red wine and watch the sun melt into the mountains behind the lake. It's one of those 'this is living' moments.

The park has a camp kitchen with a pizza oven and barbecues, but we choose to eat out each evening. It's an easy walk along the lake's edge to Jindabyne Bowling & Sports Club, which lures us with its playground and simple, pub-style food. We also dine at the lively Banjo Paterson Inn, as well as rustic Italian diner Bacco. We usually have breakfast in our caravan or grab something simple from cult bakery Sundance Bakehouse, but on our final morning, we nab a table at Birchwood cafe for a delicious and wholesome brekkie (Turkish eggs for the win!).

While snow is rare in town, the views of Lake Jindabyne from the holiday park make for a magical first sight each day. And Jindabyne itself is abuzz come après-ski time when holidaymakers, seasonal workers and locals pour into pubs and fire-warmed restaurants, chatting about their epic days on the mountain.

Next season will be our fourth family trip to Jindabyne, each year building skills, snowmen and lasting memories. It's a tradition that we will continue – and we hope the excitement of snow-spotting continues, too.

02


03

04

01 Hitting the slopes at Perisher Ski Village © Brett Hemmings/Destination NSW 02 Lake views from the holiday park © Megan Arkinstall 03 It's never too young to start learning snow moves © NRMA Jindabyne Holiday Park 04 Groms hit the magic carpet © Megan Arkinstall

Green card

- *Recycling*
- *Camp kitchen herb garden*

Camp it

NRMA Jindabyne Holiday Park is located on the edge of Lake Jindabyne in the heart of town. It's a short walk to restaurants, shops, the local skate park and many ski hire outlets, including Boss Outdoor Sports (next door). The park has powered and unpowered sites, cabins and two luxe 'glamtainers' that sleep four, as well as a ski tuning table, drying room and e-bike hire. ●

Do your homework

nrmaparksandresorts.com.au/Jindabyne
perisher.com.au
nimmitabelbakery.com.au
jindabynebowlingclub.com.au
banjopatersoninn.com.au
baccojindabyne.com
birchwoodjindabyne.au
sundancebakehouse.com.au
bossoutdoorsports.com.au

Road-trip ready

If the thought of packing for a family road trip is enough to put you off hitting the road, listen up! Make preparing for your next adventure stress-free with these simple tips.

Snacks for the road

Don't let your kids be attacked by the hangries in the backseat. It's always a good idea to bring some ready-to-eat snacks for a long drive, such as chopped fruit and carrot sticks, trail mix, muesli bars, or even treats like jelly snakes and a bag of chips.

Prepare for accidents

Winding roads and kids don't mix, and if someone gets carsick, you need to be prepared. Pack some extra towels, a spare change of clothes and some wipes, just to be safe. If your kids are prone to motion sickness, stock up on preventative child-friendly remedies from the pharmacy.

Avoid overpacking

Fight the temptation to bring your entire wardrobe along with you, and the same goes for little ones who'll want to pack all their toys. There just isn't room. Jettison unnecessary belongings and remember: most items should serve two purposes on the road.

Don't forget the fun stuff

Whether it's the beach or the bush, taking location-specific items such as bikes, fishing rods, a footy or sand toys can make the trip more fun.

Pack the essentials

No matter your destination or camping style, you should always bring water bottles, a first aid kit, sunscreen, a torch, map and raincoats in case the weather turns nasty.

BYO loo

Are you potty training? Does your child have a public toilet phobia, or can they sometimes just not wait? It pays to think about bringing a portable toilet to prevent any unpleasant mess.

Make a list

And check it twice. Writing a list of essential items to pack in the lead up to going away will help prevent any last-minute panic and indecision about what to take.

Prepare in-car entertainment

Kids are restless, especially on long journeys. Packing some toys, books, colouring-in, a device with games or movies, and a road trip playlist will keep everyone occupied during the drive. Or there's always old-fashioned I-spy.

Wet ’n’ wild

On a mission to explore Cairns’ best water-based adventures – in fresh water and salt – Catherine Best takes her family canyoning in the rainforest and snorkelling on the Great Barrier Reef.

My 13-year-old daughter is lying headfirst on her back down a sharply sloping granite slab. Guide Marcio grips her ankles, grinning manically as he counts, “Three, two, one…” He lets go and Amelie rockets into a foaming torrent of white water. She goes under and is unseen for an agonising two seconds. Finally, her head bobs to the surface, wide grin spreading beneath a gobstopper helmet. I get to relive this heart-stopping moment again and again – first with my 10-year-old daughter, then with my eight-year-old son – before it’s my turn.

We’re on a family canyoning adventure in Behana Gorge, a chain of waterfalls and granite pools in Wooroonooran National Park, about 30 minutes south of Cairns. Tumbling down from the Great Dividing Range, the gorge forms part of the World Heritage-listed Wet Tropics, a series of densely rainforested mountain ranges that extend 450 kilometres along the spine of Far North Queensland. For adventurous families, the region is one giant freshwater splash park.

Our adventure begins deep in the rainforest where the guides at Cairns Canyoning kit the five of us out in wetsuits, life jackets, harnesses and helmets. Soon we’re scrambling down the creek bank, past a large python hanging in the branches, to the water. There’s no such thing as a gentle initiation. Our first challenge is a six-metre cliff jump into a deep forest pool. Amelie – our sacrificial firstborn – goes first, barely hesitating as she pin-drops into the water with a little scream. My scream is more animated. For a moment, I don’t think I can do it, but I can’t be shown up by the kids, especially my daredevil eight-year-old whose whippet physique doesn’t match his enthusiasm.

We haul ourselves out of the water, dripping feet finding purchase on slippery rocks, and conquer another two cliff jumps as we make our way downstream. Our ‘you can’t be serious’ moment comes when we arrive at a gushing waterfall and there are two choices: ride the rapids at the head of the cascades or go behind the falls to be sucked under and spat out. All of us, except my husband, opt for the tamer ride and are

01 Canyoning Behana Gorge © Alex Mioni/Tourism Tropical North Queensland

02 Reef Magic pontoon © Phil Warring/ Tourism Tropical North Queensland 03 Gorge jumping © Cairns Canyoning 04 Snorkel fun © Catherine Best 05 Abseiling down Behana Gorge © Cairns Canyoning

swept down a chute of churning water – spluttering and gasping – into a calm eddy. It's one helluva natural jacuzzi.

The two hours go quickly, alternating between cliff jumps, rapids and waterfall plunges, with a dry abseil towards the end. Over 500 metres, we ping-pong through narrow cascades, hurtle down rockslides and ride chutes of white water in a human train. Three guides keep the group safe and energised – "backflip, easy peasy!" Marcio likes to exclaim. This is the same man who sends my family headfirst into a raging washing machine of angry water. And we love every minute of it.

Reef Magic

Thankfully, there's no white water in sight when we board a catamaran to the outer Great Barrier Reef for a full-day snorkelling adventure with Reef Magic. The 90-minute crossing is plain sailing and we're soon pulling on wetsuits, fins and masks to peer into an underwater wilderness of coral gardens and curtains of shimmering tropical fish. After the high-adrenaline thrills of canyoning, snorkelling is an easy, tranquil experience, helped by the ultramodern facilities aboard the Great Barrier Reef's newest pontoon.

Launched at Moore Reef in 2022, Reef Magic is a three-level, 45-metre-long springboard to the largest living organism on the planet. The pontoon is a great option for young families and nervous swimmers, with lots of opportunities to safely access the reef, without necessarily getting wet. A 15-metre-long platform provides easy access to the water, while more adventurous reef-seekers (aged 12-plus) can scuba dive or helmet dive (think walking on the seabed like an underwater astronaut). For landlubbers, there's also an underwater observatory on the pontoon and regular glass-bottom boat tours, while toddlers can splash in a shallow caged pool.

What sets Reef Magic apart from other family friendly operators is its commitment to sustainability, reef conservation and First Nations culture. Indigenous cultural guides share Gunggandji Sea Country creation stories, and the pontoon is green powered, harnessing wind and solar energy. The crew also leads Reef Recovery Days, which is how we find ourselves wrist-deep in a tub of coral soup that is best described – by my kids – as reef snot. We're planting broken coral fragments onto hexagonal frames known as reef stars, and each finger of coral oozes a smelly slime of protective mucous. Onboard marine biologist Brittany Wassing shows us how to carefully zip-tie the fragments onto the frame, which will be linked together on seabed rubble to eventually form a new coral reef.

"We've got reef stars out on Moore Reef here today that are just over four years old and you cannot even see the steel framework, that's how extensively the corals have grown," Brittany says. More than 6,000 coral fragments have been planted on 439 stars at Moore Reef. You can see them on a glass-bottom boat tour, but we opt to spend most of our day in the water. We join a guided snorkel safari to the outer lagoon, where a wall of plate coral meets deeper water, teeming with large pelagic fish including trevally, bream and snapper. It's a fish blizzard, climaxing with a white-tipped reef shark that flashes beneath us.

The shark sighting is the kids' highlight, but years from now they will recall how they helped conserve the Great Barrier Reef. ●

Green card

- *Eco-certified operators*
- *Reef Magic is wind and solar powered*
- *Reef conservation program*

Do your homework

cairnscanyoning.com
reefmagic.com.au
ingeniaholidays.com.au
skyrail.com.au
ksr.com.au

02

On-land adventures

When it's time to dry out, make for the mountains on a day excursion to the rainforest hamlet of Kuranda. A joint ticket on the Skyway Rainforest Cableway and the Kuranda Scenic Railway gets the family two-for-one thrills. Take the cableway first and soar over the treetops, stopping off at Barron Gorge and Red Peak. Return to Cairns on the train as it snakes through tunnels, over bridges and alongside rushing waterfalls and ravines.

03

05

04

Camp it

BIG4 Ingenia Holidays Cairns Coconut is the Disneyland of holiday parks, with a squeal-eliciting bounty of wet and dry facilities to delight kids of all ages, and various accommodation options to satisfy every budget. Sites and cabins are set within a landscaped tropical oasis eight kilometres south of the city. Our kids ran themselves ragged at the waterslides, splash park, jumping pillows and arcade parlour, but I secretly loved the massage cabin and the enormous adults-only spa. There's even an outdoor cinema, restaurant, milk bar and dog agility course.

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Holiday parks

52
Readers' Choice Holiday Park Awards

74
Australia's coolest pools

78
Paradise on Queensland's Central Coast

82
Exploring Lake Macquarie

© Tourism and Events Queensland

BEST OF AWARDS
CCWK
2024
HOLIDAY PARKS

Best Holiday Parks Awards

The results are in for the 2024 *Caravan & Camping with Kids* Readers' Choice Best Holiday Parks Awards.

Australia's holiday parks offer an affordable, family friendly escape for travellers of all kinds. With locations across diverse landscapes, from idyllic beaches and rainforests to rolling fields and deserts, these one-stop shops provide a fantastic base from which families can explore nature, without sacrificing creature comforts such as splash parks, playgrounds, live entertainment and delicious eateries. Some parks even welcome family members of the four-legged variety.

Increasingly accessible and welcoming, these holiday parks are thoughtfully designed to cater for families who BYO tent, camper trailer, motorhome or caravan, or opt to stay in a cabin, villa or glamping tent. Whether nestled in the lush forests of Queensland, along the pristine beaches of New South Wales, or near the rugged coastlines of Western Australia, each park offers a unique experience that brings families closer to nature, and each other. And the winners are...

01 BIG4 Narooma Easts Beach Holiday Park © stimages.com.au 02 BIG4 Easts Beach Holiday Park © NEG photography
03 RAC Monkey Mia Dolphin Resort © Timothy M Campbell 04 NRMA Ocean Beach Holiday Resort

For further information on all *Caravan & Camping with Kids* Readers' Choice Best Holiday Parks Awards 2024 winners, visit

holidayswithkids.com.au/best-holiday-parks

NSW

1 NRMA Ocean Beach Holiday Resort

Umina Beach | 🐾 ♿

Tucked between the bush and the beach on the gorgeous Central Coast, this holiday park is just a 90-minute drive from Sydney. Swimming pools, playgrounds, a bouncing pillow, kids' club and Bear Grylls Survival Academy are sure to keep little nippers entertained, while the on-site cafe and abundant facilities ensure parents have all they need and more to enjoy a relaxing summer holiday. Perched alongside Umina Beach, the park offers a choice of cabins, glamping safari tents, luxury glamtainers and campsites. Pedal kart and e-bike hire will get the whole family moving. *nrmaparksandresorts.com.au*

2 BIG4 Easts Beach Holiday Park

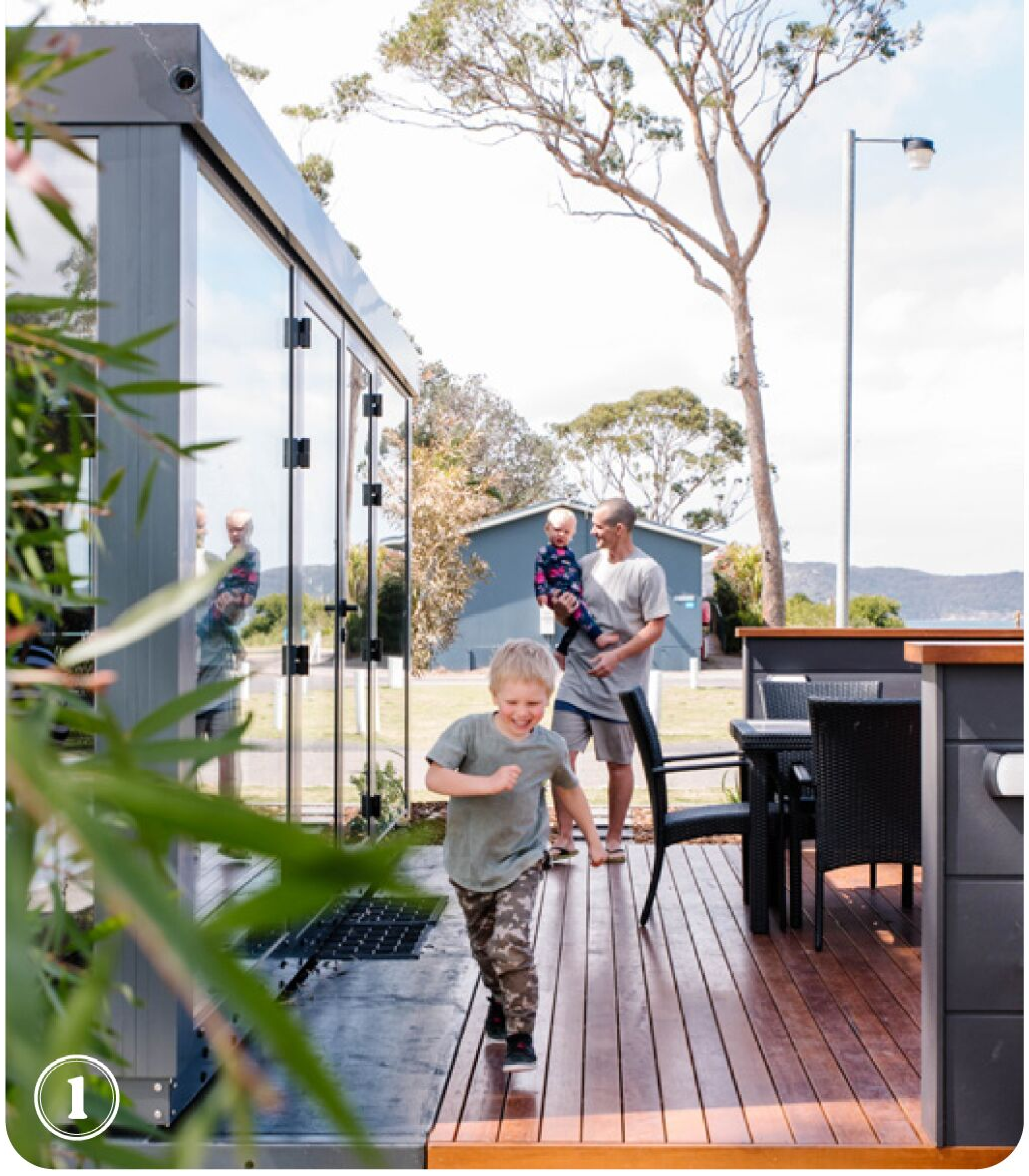
Kiama | ♿

Hidden away in the seaside town of Kiama, BIG4 Easts Beach Holiday Park boasts a stunning beachfront location with water views and a selection of beach retreats, spa villas, cabins and powered sites. Mums, dads, toddlers, tweens and teens are well catered for with a huge pool complex, while fun times are guaranteed at Sunny's Aquaventure Park, the playground, games room, jumping pillow and rope-play area. The Breakaway Cafe serves up beachside breakfasts and burgers, and there's a mini-mart for grabbing supplies on the go. The park also has a seasonal roster of activities, such as discos for the kids and family movie nights. *eastsbeach.com.au*

3 BIG4 Narooma Easts Holiday Park

Narooma | 🐾

Located on NSW's far south coast on the cusp of Wagonga Inlet, BIG4 Narooma Easts Holiday Park is a year-round family destination with an indoor heated splash park and spa pool, jumping pillow, pedal-powered go karts, tennis court and recreation room. Families can choose from safari tents, condos, cabins, bungalows and unpowered or powered sites, while all guests enjoy access to the barbecue areas, outdoor chess board and waterfront gym equipment. Bring your dog, kayak and boogie board, this one is a goodie. *eastsnarooma.com.au*



4 Tasman Holiday Parks – North Star

Hastings Point

5 Del Rio Riverside Resort

Webbs Creek | 🐾

6 NRMA Blue Dolphin Yamba Holiday Resort

Yamba | 🐾

7 NRMA South West Rocks Holiday Resort

South West Rocks | 🐾

8 Holiday Haven Lake Conjola

Lake Conjola | 🐾

9 BIG4 Tweed Billabong Holiday Park

Tweed Heads South | ♿

10 BIG4 Saltwater Yamba Holiday Park

Palmers Island | 🐾 ♿

11 BIG4 Park Beach Holiday Park

Coffs Harbour | ♿

12 NRMA Darlington Beach Holiday Resort

Coffs Coast | 🐾 ♿

13 BIG4 Ingenia Holidays Soldiers Point

Port Stephens | 🐾 ♿

14 BIG4 Happy Hallidays Holiday Park

Hallidays Point | 🐾

15 Swansea Lakeside Holiday Park

Lake Macquarie

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Our holiday park is the ideal location from which to explore the south coast, with popular tourist attractions such as Jamberoo Action Park and the Minnamurra Rainforest just minutes away.

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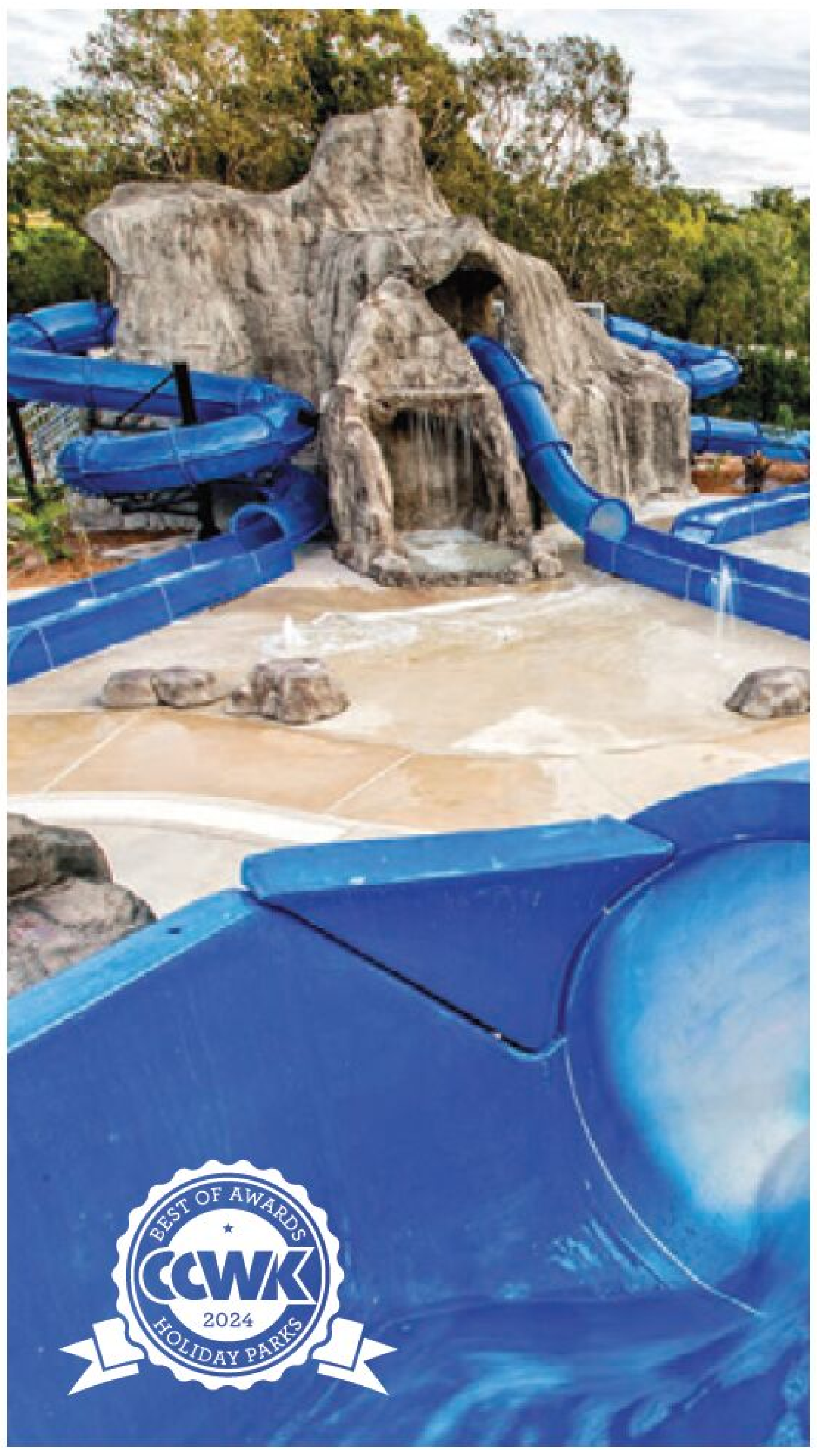
BIG4
HOLIDAY PARKS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www.tweedbillabong.com.au

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www.big4saltwater.com.au

Salty's Cove Yamba
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HOLIDAY PARKS

BIG4 Tweed Billabong HOLIDAY PARK

BIG4 HOLIDAY PARKS

BIG4 Saltwater @ Yamba HOLIDAY PARK

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BIG4 HOLIDAY PARKS

BIG4 GOLD COAST HOLIDAY PARK

QLD

1 BIG4 Gold Coast Holiday Park

Gold Coast | 🐾 ♿

Splash into a mammoth water park, share stories around the campfire, or let the kids run wild at the eco playground. BIG4 Gold Coast Holiday Park is brimming with action and family friendly activities. It also boasts a killer location, just a hop, skip and jump from the Gold Coast's iconic theme parks. Dog-friendly accommodation, from multi-bedroom retreats and cabins to caravan and camping sites, means your furry family members can join in the fun too. There's also an off-leash area at the back of the park, along with a Puppy Pamper Palace dog wash. *goldcoastholidaypark.com.au*

2 Nobby Beach Holiday Village

Gold Coast

Located a short walk from the golden sands of the Gold Coast's Nobby Beach, this holiday park brings all the surf and sun needed for an epic summer getaway. The ninja playground packs a punch for little monkeys, while the two heated outdoor swimming pools and 35-metre waterslide are a winner with the whole family. Hit the games room for all-weather family fun or enjoy old-school entertainment courtesy of the stash of board games and DVDs available for loan. On the park's doorstep is a vibrant alfresco dining scene and lots of boutique shopping opportunities at local markets and stores. *nobbybeachholidayvillage.com.au*

3 BIG4 Adventure Whitsunday Resort

Airlie Beach | ♿

Non-stop fun is what you'll find at this much-loved holiday resort. If the kids' club or mega water park (with a whopping 13 colourful slides) isn't enough, try a round of mini-golf at the 18-hole course or visit the chooks, ducklings and lambs at the resort's very own animal park. Enjoy a host of year-round activities, including wildlife shows and movies at the outdoor cinema, and don't miss out on a poolside massage (parents, this one's for you). Located in Airlie Beach, the resort is your clan's ideal tropical base for exploring the incredible Whitsunday Islands and the Great Barrier Reef. *adventurewhitsunday.com.au*

4 BIG4 Sandstone Point Holiday Resort

Sandstone Point | ♿

5 Broadwater Tourist Park

Gold Coast | ♿

6 NRMA Treasure Island Holiday Resort

Gold Coast | 🐾 ♿

7 BIG4 Ingenia Holidays Cairns Coconut

Cairns | 🐾 ♿

8 Brisbane Holiday Village

Eight Mile Plains | ♿

9 BIG4 Caloundra Waterfront

Caloundra | 🐾 ♿

10 Ashmore Palms Holiday Village

Gold Coast | ♿

11 BIG4 Breeze Holiday Parks Rainbow Beach

Rainbow Beach | 🐾 ♿

12 BIG4 Tasman Holiday Parks South Mission Beach

South Mission Beach

13 BIG4 Breeze Holiday Parks – Cania Gorge

Cania | 🐾 ♿

14 BIG4 Port Douglas Glengarry Holiday Park

Port Douglas | ♿

15 Tallebudgera Creek Tourist Park

Gold Coast | ♿

VIC

1 NRMA Ballarat Holiday Park

Ballarat | 🐾 ♿

Situated close to Sovereign Hill, this holiday park provides unparalleled access to the gold-rush-era historic site, alongside facilities such as a swimming pool, playground, sensory room, bouncing pillow and spa. Hire a pedal kart or e-bike, play a few rounds of tennis or basketball with the family, or send the kids to join one of the seasonal holiday activities. Providing accessible and pet-friendly accommodation options, including villas, cabins, bunkhouses and unpowered and powered camping and caravan sites, this park has everything you need, just 90 minutes' drive from Melbourne. *nrmaparksandresorts.com.au/ballarat*

2 BIG4 Ingenia Holidays Inverloch

Inverloch

Located a short stroll from the beach on Victoria's popular Bass Coast, BIG4 Ingenia Holidays Inverloch is a popular family park, also just 90 minutes' drive from Melbourne. Cabins, villas and eco tents, plus ensuite and powered caravan and camping sites, are up for grabs here. And while tranquil Anderson Inlet is on the park's doorstep, there's no need to leave the park, which boasts an indoor heated pool and splash park with water slides, a jump pad, kids' adventure playground, basketball hoop and games room. Less than 10 minutes away you'll find the Dinosaur Dreaming fossil site and the picturesque sea stack of Eagle's Nest. *ingeniaholidays.com.au*

3 BIG4 Bellarine Holiday Park

Marcus Hill | ♿

You'd be forgiven for thinking you'd signed up for an African safari at the BIG4 Bellarine, which has an assortment of huge African animal statues outside its safari tents. The park packs more surprises with a BMX track, indoor heated pool, flying fox, gym, movie room, jumping pillow, water playground and indoor toddler playroom. Located just 30 minutes' drive from Geelong, on the Bellarine Peninsula, the park has options to suit every family and budget, including powered and unpowered sites, glamping tents, suites and units, while the Adventure Park, Bellarine Railway and Fort Queenscliff Museum are close by. *big4bellarine.com.au*

4 Halls Gap Lakeside Tourist Park

Grampians

5 BIG4 Taggerty Holiday Park

Taggerty | ♿

6 BIG4 Ingenia Holidays Queenscliff Beacon

Queenscliff | ♿

7 BIG4 Wye River Holiday Park

Wye River | ♿

8 Anglesea Family Caravan Park

Anglesea | 🐾 ♿

9 BIG4 Bendigo Marong Holiday Park

Bendigo | 🐾 ♿

10 BIG4 Bendigo Park Lane Holiday Park

Bendigo | 🐾 ♿

11 BIG4 Ballarat Windmill Holiday Park

Ballarat | 🐾

12 BIG4 Swan Hill Holiday Park

Swan Hill | 🐾 ♿

13 BIG4 Tasman Holiday Parks – Warrnambool

Warrnambool | 🐾

14 BIG4 Melbourne Holiday Park

Coburg North | ♿

15 Ocean Grove Holiday Park

Ocean Grove | ♿

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BIG4
SWAN HILL

BIG4 Swan Hill Holiday Park is situated in the cosy little town of Swan Hill North Victoria.

The Park provides everything you need for a great holiday, a Splash Park with giant tipping bucket, solar heated swimming pool and toddler pool, Giant jumping pillow, playground, 18 hole mini golf, pedal karts, games room and The Barn for groups staying in the park.

Accommodation offers 1, 2 & 3 bedroom Cabins and Powered Ensuite and camping sites available including pet friendly apartments and camp sites.

big4swanhill.com

03 5032 4372 stay@big4swanhill.com.au
Big4 Swan Hill, 186 Murray Valley Hwy

© ST Images

1 BIG4 Renmark Riverfront Holiday Park

Renmark | ♿

This holiday park brings the buzz with a bounty of top-notch activities. The adventure playground and water park guarantee grins, while the outdoor cinema, sensory room and alfresco spa offer a tranquil way to play. Located on the banks of the mighty Murray River, the park offers endless opportunities to get back to nature – be it fishing, water-skiing or swimming. Relax in a riverfront villa, set up on a powered or unpowered site or, for an ooh-la-la moment, stay in a glamping tent that sleeps six and comes with an outdoor bath. *big4renmark.com.au*

2 BIG4 West Beach Parks

Adelaide | ♿

3 Marion Holiday Park

Bedford Park | ♿

4 BIG4 Blue Lake Holiday Park

Mount Gambier | 🐾 ♿

5 Discovery Parks – Lake Bonney

Barmera | 🐾 ♿

6 NRMA Victor Harbor Beachfront Holiday Park

Victor Harbor | 🐾 ♿

7 BIG4 Breeze Holiday Parks – Port Elliot

Port Elliot | 🐾 ♿

8 BIG4 Barossa Tourist Park

Nuriootpa | 🐾 ♿

1 Mandalay Holiday Resort & Tourist Park

Busselton | 🐾 ♿

Located between Busselton and Dunsborough at the gateway to the Margaret River region, Mandalay Holiday Resort offers self-contained chalets, cabins, luxury two-storey villas, glamping tents and campsites set amongst peppermint trees. The perfect base to explore the sandy beaches and sunsets of southwest WA, the park is a short stroll to the beach and has communal fire pits and a games room. Kids can take a dip in the indoor or outdoor pools, hit the waterslide or work off some energy at the Summit Tower Playground with jumping pillow. *mandalayresort.com.au*

2 BIG4 Breeze Holiday Parks – Busselton

Busselton | 🐾 ♿

3 RAC Monkey Mia Dolphin Resort

Shark Bay | 🐾 ♿

4 BIG4 Emu Beach Holiday Park

Albany | 🐾 ♿

5 Discovery Parks Margaret River

Cowaramup | 🐾 ♿

6 Gracetown Caravan Park

Margaret River

7 BIG4 Denmark Ocean Beach Holiday Park

Denmark | 🐾 ♿

8 RAC Cervantes Holiday Park

Cervantes | 🐾 ♿

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NT

1 Aspen Holidays Darwin FreeSpirit Resort

Darwin | 🐾 ♿

Just 15 minutes south of Darwin's CBD, this pet-loving park welcomes families with its laid-back atmosphere and tropical gardens. From modern villas with patios and air conditioning to traditional campsites, the range of accommodation caters to all demographics. Let the kids run wild at the playground and jumping pillow, then refresh in the sparkling lagoon pool with waterfall. Afterwards, tuck into fresh seafood or pizza at the poolside bar, featuring a kids' menu. The park is the perfect base for exploring the NT capital and the natural wonders of the Top End. *aspenholidayparks.com.au*

2 Discovery Parks – Alice Springs

Alice Springs | 🐾 ♿

3 BIG4 Howard Springs Holiday Park

Darwin | 🐾 ♿

4 Nitmiluk Campground

Katherine | ♿

5 BIG4 Hidden Valley Holiday Park

Darwin | 🐾 ♿

TAS

1 BIG4 Launceston Holiday Park

Launceston | ♿

The picturesque Cataract Gorge, museums and Launceston's vibrant streetscapes are right on your doorstep at BIG4 Launceston Holiday Park in Northern Tasmania. The multi-award-winning property offers everything from powered sites to open-plan villas and three-bedroom condos, accommodating families of all sizes. Whether you plan to visit vineyards, pick fruit, explore nature reserves or journey into the regions beyond, you'll find all you need at this convenient and comfortable holiday park. *big4launceston.com.au*

2 BIG4 Tassie Getaway Parks St Helens

St Helens | 🐾 ♿

3 BIG4 Tassie Getaway Parks Ulverstone

Ulverstone | 🐾 ♿

4 Captain Cook Holiday Park

Bruny Island | 🐾

5 NRMA Port Arthur Holiday Park

Port Arthur | ♿

6 Discovery Parks – Cradle Mountain

Cradle Mountain | ♿

7 BIG4 Iluka on Freycinet Holiday Park

Coles Bay | ♿

Nitmiluk
Katherine

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BEST OF AWARDS CCWK 2024 HOLIDAY PARKS

G'DAY PARKS

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Congratulations

to all the winners of the *Caravan & Camping with Kids* Readers' Choice Best Holiday Parks Awards 2024!

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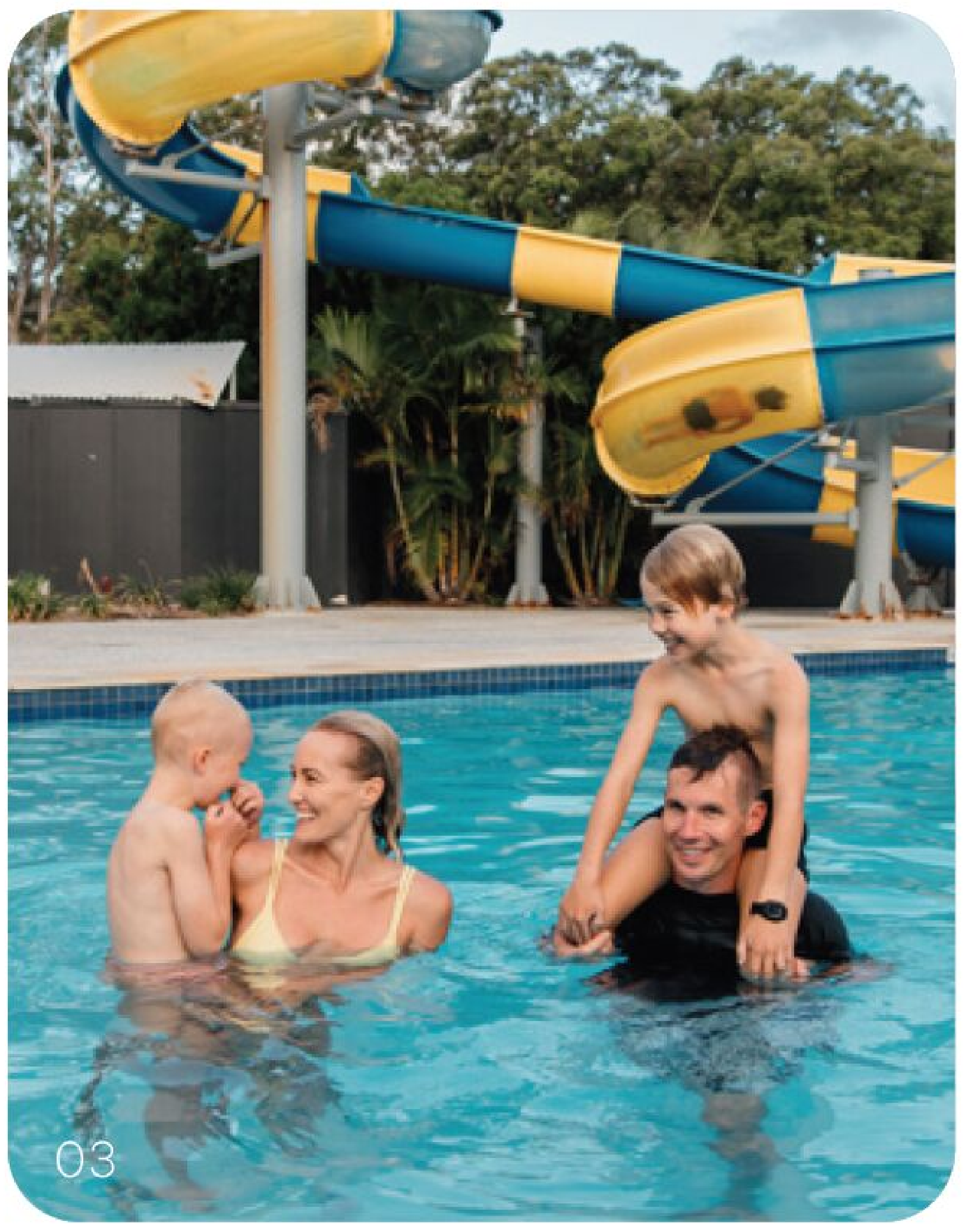
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01 BIG4 Gold Coast Holiday Park 02 BIG4 Tassie Getaway Parks St Helens 03 Nobby Beach Holiday Village © Brooke Darling

Nothing speaks louder than a great recommendation, and our readers have rated each of these holiday parks as true standouts. We're thrilled to congratulate the winners, and send a heartfelt thank you to every reader who took the time to cast their vote and help us share the very finest destinations with you. Your enthusiasm, effort and thoughtful input have made these awards possible, and we hope they continue to spark your imagination and inspire memorable family holidays for years to come.

Have your say...

Voting for our *Caravan & Camping with Kids* Readers' Choice Best Holiday Parks Awards 2025 is now open. Don't miss the opportunity to have your say on your favourite family accommodation experiences. Plus, all those who vote have the chance to win an amazing prize. So, what are you waiting for? Head online to vote now!

holidayswithkids.com.au/best-holiday-parks

Vote & Win

Vote in our Readers' Choice Awards for your chance to win an amazing five-night stay at BIG4 Adventure Whitsunday Resort, valued at $3,000!

Prepare to spend hours rocketing down waterslides, befriending baby goats or simply relaxing poolside at sunset – assuming you're not busy snorkelling with turtles! Multi-award-winning BIG4 Adventure Whitsunday Resort is a mega 13-slide waterpark and holiday park in one, ideally located at the gateway to the Great Barrier Reef.

Set amid lush tropical gardens in Airlie Beach, the family operated resort offers outstanding facilities in a stunning location – close to waterfalls, beaches and a multitude of reef excursions. The park has a huge lagoon pool complex, animal park, mini-golf course, jumping pillows, outdoor cinema, kids' club and even a massage hut. There's also a wide range of campsites and cabin accommodation to suit every travelling family. *adventurewhitsunday.com.au*

Prize includes

- Five nights' accommodation in a two-bedroom cottage for two adults and two children
- Two kids' activity packs upon arrival
- Access to all park facilities

To enter, scan the QR code or visit holidayswithkids.com.au/win-big4-adventure

Terms & Conditions: Competition closes 11:59pm (AEST) Sunday, 15 June 2025 and the winner will be notified by email shortly after. The competition is open to Australian residents over 18 years old only. Prize is not transferable or redeemable for cash and can only be used towards accommodation. Bookings are subject to availability. Blackout dates apply, including school holidays and peak periods. Prize voucher is valid until 15 June 2026. By entering the competition, you agree to receive the *Holidays with Kids* and *Caravan & Camping with Kids* enewsletters. For full competition terms and conditions visit our website.

Win!

Feeling lucky? Enter our giveaways for your chance to win some of these goodies!

Win one of six Lonely Planet Kids book packs

Packed with loads of ideas for family games, crafts and activities, Create Your Own Camping Activities and Create Your Own Holiday Games will provide endless fun ways to enjoy your next holiday or camping adventure. RRP $49.98 per pack *lonelyplanet.com*

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Holiday
GAMES
Create Your Own
Camping
ACTIVITIES
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Win a Gypsea Loop bangle

The Gypsea Loop is a stylish bangle that gets your hair band off your wrist and turns it into a fashion statement. Developed by caravanning blogger and YouTuber Tracy Morris, of the Blonde Nomads, the oval bangle has a snug channel for your hair band, with a clever finger groove for easy release. The winner can choose from silver (polished stainless steel) or gold (18K gold-plated). RRP $119 *gypsealoop.com*

Win a Gerber Gear ComplEAT Cook Set

Gerber Gear's new ComplEAT Cook Set strikes the right balance between durable functionality and compact convenience. The 16-piece kit has everything you need to create a delicious family meal, including a generous pot, sauté pan, chef's knife and cutting board set, mixing bowl, hot pad and tableware for four. RRP $329 *gerbergear.com.au*

To enter, scan the QR code or visit holidayswithkids.com.au/giveaways

Terms & Conditions: Competition ends 11:59pm (AEST) Friday, 13 June 2025 and the winners will be notified shortly after by email. By entering the competition you agree to receive the *Caravan & Camping with Kids* enewsletter. Prizes are not exchangeable or redeemable for cash. Visit our website for full terms and conditions pertaining to Signature Media competitions.

BIG WHITE

Currarong calm

Snuggled between beach and bush in an unspoilt pocket of NSW's South Coast, Holiday Haven Currarong is the perfect place to get back to basics, discovers Eleanor Edstrom.

"Found one!" It's low tide, and we're clambering over sun-dappled rockpools in search of limpets. Aside from the laughter of a nearby family, no doubt as smitten as we are with our turquoise surrounds, the beach is blissfully quiet. It's a welcome change from the frantic tempo of city life.

We've escaped Sydney, and in fewer than three hours we have checked in for a weekend getaway at Holiday Haven Currarong, a pet-friendly hideaway on the Beecroft Peninsula to the north of Jervis Bay. With direct beach and river access, the park is ideally positioned between Currarong's natural splendours and the village's sleepy seaside shacks. There's little phone reception (though the park offers free Wi-Fi) and the closest general store is 15 minutes away in Callala Bay. But Currarong's seclusion is its greatest drawcard. Popular with families seeking to swap screen time for beach time, the area is brimming with crowd-free coves, grassy picnic areas and kid-friendly walking trails. And it is much quieter than iconic Huskisson and Hyams Beach, both of which can be found a 35-minute drive south.

Home base

"Bombs away!" A giant splash erupts from the park's newly renovated pool. Giggle mode activated. Within 10 minutes of rolling into the park, we've already sniffed out the swimming complex, splash pad, massive climbing tower and nine-hole mini-golf course. A group of young teens on pedal carts waves to us as they advertise their hair-braiding services, and we know there's hours of fun to be had here.

Holiday Haven Currarong offers a generous selection of grassy campsites and family cabins. Our air-conditioned, two-bedroom Seabreeze Cabin is bright, airy and impeccably clean, ticking all our comfort boxes. There's a cosy TV area, fully equipped kitchen and a modern ensuite that's more akin to a five-star resort (I still can't stop

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Green card

- *Refillable water stations*
- *Biodegradable dog waste bags*
- *Recycling*

01 The perfect coastal family getaway at Currarong Beach © Dee Kramer/Destination NSW   02 Splashtastic fun at Holiday Haven Currarong   03 Camping DIY style on the lush grounds © Josh Brnjac   04 Fun for everyone in the park cabins © Josh Brnjac

04

thinking about the shower head). We play a round of UNO on our outdoor terrace before hiring some stand-up paddleboards from the friendly park managers, Bec and Alex, at reception. The best part? We're just a one-minute walk from Currarong Creek, a calm sanctuary ideal for paddleboarding or kayaking when the tide's up or wading with toddlers at low tide.

Beach hopping

Surrounded by 14 secluded white-sand beaches, Currarong is an ocean lover's nirvana. We kick off our beach-hopping at Honeymoon Bay, a serene horseshoe-shaped inlet a short drive from the village. Though popular at sunset, our clan opts to come late morning when the sapphire waters are in full sparkle and the snorkelling conditions are top notch. We take our time soaking up the serenity before heading to the southernmost point of the peninsula, Point Perpendicular Lighthouse. The crown jewel of the headland stands proud over a curtain of striking sandstone cliffs, offering captivating views of Jervis Bay and, during the cooler months, migrating humpback whales.

But we don't need to stray far from the holiday park to enjoy the peninsula. Less than 100 metres away is Currarong Beach, an off-leash haven fantastic for boogie boarding, surfing and fishing. You can even book the kids in for a surf session at the locally owned Currarong Surf School, offering private and group lessons for kids five years and older. It's a bit windy during our visit, so we stroll 10 minutes beyond the creek to a sheltered cove at Abrahams Bosom Reserve. Here, we swim ourselves silly and poke about in the nearby rockpools, donning grins as wide as the ocean itself. The reserve boasts a network of family friendly walking trails that snake past fern forests, secret coves and the SS *Merimbula* shipwreck, run aground in 1928.

Family feed

When little tummies start to rumble, we make our way over to the Currarong Bowling Club for dinner. An easy five-minute walk from the park, the club has all the goods for a fun family night out. Highchairs, shaded playground and a fab kids' menu? Check. Live rock band? Check. There's even a cute little pizza and gelato bar.

While pizza is tempting, we feast on an impressive seafood tower stacked with a locally sourced bounty from nearby Shellharbour. Think supersized prawns, freshly shucked oysters and lobster mornay for the adults, and moreish beer-battered chips and salt and pepper calamari for the little ones.

We end our stay with a barefoot walk on Currarong Beach, ice creams in hand and foamy waves tickling our toes. With no other beachgoers in sight, we feel like the rulers of a secret seaside kingdom. If only we could abandon city life for good. ●

Do your homework

Holiday Haven Currarong is just under three hours' drive south of Sydney.

holidayhaven.com.au/currarong

shoalhaven.com

currarongclub.com.au

currarongsurfschool.com.au

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When you stay at any of Holiday Haven's 12 prime waterfront parks across the Shoalhaven region, you can enjoy the most beautiful pockets of Australia as your home away from home. Wake up to sunrise over crystal clear waters, explore secluded beaches and ancient forests, sample delicious local produce, and meander through your friendly neighbourhood of small towns and villages.

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Kangaroo Valley Shoalhaven Heads Culburra Beach Currarong White Sands Huskisson Beach
Swan Lake Bendalong Lake Conjola Ulladulla Burrill Lake Lake Tabourie

Cool pools

From oceanfront lagoons with spellbinding views to waterslides and swim-up bars, these are 10 of Australia's coolest holiday park pools, writes Eleanor Edstrom.

Discovery Resorts – Lake Argyle KUNUNURRA, WA

Wow factor Thirty-five metres of infinity edge dissolving into Australia's second-largest man-made freshwater lake. Do holiday park pools get any more five-star? Dip into this sumptuous swimming pool at sunset to watch lavender hues melt into rosy rocks as night advances across the Carr Boyd Range. This is the coolest way to enjoy the Kimberley.

Why we love it Just a short drive south of Kununurra, this holiday park has accommodation options to suit every family. Make the most of your stay and join a cruise aboard the resort's custom-built tour boat, the *Kimberley Durack*, to spot some of Lake Argyle's 35,000 freshwater crocodiles. *discoveryholidayparks.com*

BIG4 Ingenia Holidays Lake Conjola LAKE CONJOLA, NSW

Wow factor This elegant and generously sized heated pool features a circular wooden platform where you can lay, play or plunge. With ample poolside seating, the space is easy for parents to keep an eye on their water babies, whether they're splashing in the shallows in floaties or hurtling through the adjacent waterpark.

Why we love it A same-day drive from Sydney or Canberra, Lake Conjola is a convenient coastal destination to steal away to for the weekend. Set up camp at a powered site or opt for a lagoon lodge, a stone's throw from fishing, kayaking and waterskiing opportunities. The park is also pet friendly, so you can bring the fur-baby along too. *ingeniaholidays.com.au*

Cygnet Bay Pearl Farm DAMPIER PENINSULA, WA

Wow factor Pools immersed in nature are arguably the best kind: the chatter of red-collared lorikeets, the lull of the waves, the silky embrace of warm water. Glamp or camp at Cygnet Bay Pearl Farm and you and your bubs will have access to the farm's awesome infinity pool. Surrounded by native flora, the pool offers one of the most scenic vantage points in Cygnet Bay.

Why we love it Bundles of family friendly adventures beckon on the stunning Dampier Peninsula. Hire a dinghy for a day's fishing, take ocean-loving kiddies on a snorkelling safari, or experience a live pearl harvest while learning about the Indigenous origins of the prized gem. *cygnetbaypearlfarm.com.au*

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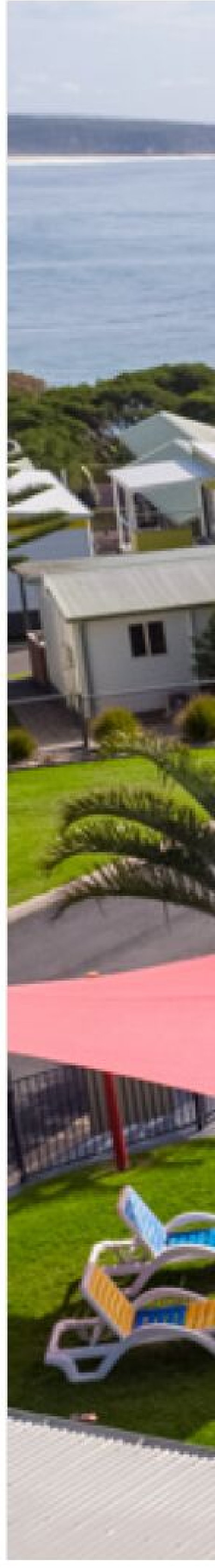

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RAC Esperance Holiday Park ESPERANCE, WA

Wow factor H20 heaven is what you'll find at this seaside holiday park. The pine-tree-fringed pool boasts azure ocean views to rival the region's magnificent beaches. Watch the kids play Marco Polo while you unwind on a sun lounger or jump in and join the splash-and-play fray.
Why we love it While it's tempting to lay poolside all day, Esperance's obscenely photogenic coastline beckons. The whole clan will love meeting kangaroos by the water at Lucky Bay, beach hopping along the Great Ocean Drive, and exploring idyllic inlets at Woody Island. Blues on blues on blues!
parksandresorts.rac.com.au

RAC Monkey Mia Dolphin Resort MONKEY MIA, WA

Wow factor Do the kids fancy a feathered friend with their afternoon dip? This sparkling resort pool on the shores of a renowned dolphin habitat comes with emus to boot. The birds are often seen patrolling the park, where you will also find swathes of luxuriant grass and a shaded kids' playground.
Why we love it With wild bottlenose dolphins cruising the shallows just off the beach, this resort has the best of World Heritage-listed Shark Bay at its doorstep. After joining the morning dolphin feeding session, take to the water in a kayak to spot turtles, sharks, rays and even dugongs. Rust-red dunes contrast dramatically with turquoise water, making this an excellent backdrop for your family adventures.
parksandresorts.rac.com.au

Cobbold Gorge FORSAYTH, QLD

Wow factor An infinity pool cosied up alongside Queensland's youngest gorge. It's a match made in heaven. Take a gorge tour in the morning and in the afternoon, cool off in the epic outback pool with swim-up bar overlooking the dam.
Why we love it An unsung hero of outback North Queensland, Cobbold Gorge is an epic geological marvel. Take a guided tour and cruise through the narrow gorge by boat, trekking up the sandstone cliffs to learn about its formation. If the family has good balance, you can even take to the water on a stand-up paddleboard.
cobboldgorge.com.au

NRMA Merimbula Beach Holiday Resort MERIMBULA, NSW

Wow factor Creatively patterned splash parks and loungers are all good fun, but it's million-dollar views that make a pool a winner. Perched atop a headland, this picture-perfect pool looks out over the Sapphire Coast and mountainous NSW hinterland.
Why we love it The resort offers year-round kids' activities, from arts and crafts to family movies under the stars. After a bouncing pillow session or hit of tennis, hire an e-bike and spot whales from the shore, before following meandering coastal estuaries along

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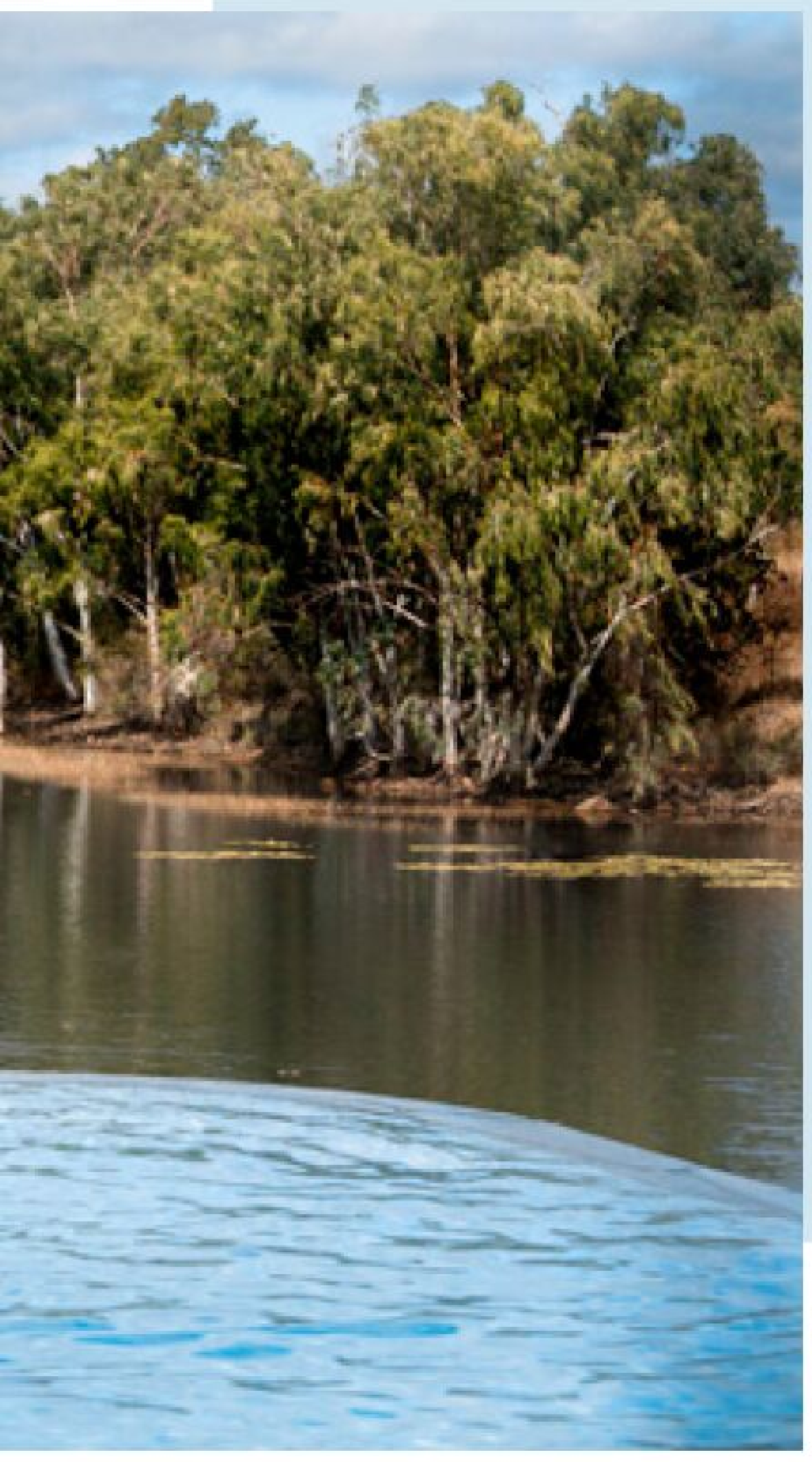

01 Lake Argle © Discovery Resorts Lake Argle 02 RAC Esperance Holiday Park © Jessica Wyld 03 NRMA Merimbula Beach Holiday Resort 04 Cygnet Bay Pearl Farm © Saltywings 05 Cobbold Gorge © Tourism and Events Queensland

the Merimbula Boardwalk. Come evening, the on-site pizza oven works wonders for rumbling tummies.
nrmaparksandresorts.com.au

BIG4 Sandstone Point Holiday Resort

SANDSTONE POINT, QLD

Wow factor Expect serious beach club vibes here. This is an aquascape packed with palm trees and striped umbrellas, where your hardest decision will be which body of water to dip into first. Adults will love the huge heated pool, swim-up bar and jacuzzi, while the splash zone's five slides and tipping bucket will keep younger kids giggling for hours and hours.

Why we love it Boredom is unthinkable at this fun-filled holiday park at the gateway to Bribie Island. Play giant chess, zoom around on a go-kart or take to the pump track. Swap your tent for an overwater villa and enjoy direct access to a natural swimming hole.
sandstonepointholidayresort.com.au

Marion Holiday Park

ADELAIDE, SA

Wow factor Indulge in 45 metres of solar-heated fun. This splendid outdoor lap lagoon is the place to be in summer, with dress circle access available from the premium poolside units. The park also has an indoor heated pool and water playground that lures the mischievous with a splash bucket and water guns. Hours of entertainment are guaranteed for the whole family.

Why we love it There's oodles of dry fun too! Claim a funky beanbag or a private booth in the beer garden for an outdoor cinema screening, or visit the mini 10-pin bowling alley and games room (think table tennis, prize machines and a pool table).
marionhp.com.au

BIG4 Adventure Whitsunday Resort

AIRLIE BEACH, QLD

Wow factor Thirteen waterslides – need we say more? This resort is more theme park than humble caravan park. Sit in a giant frog's mouth, splash beneath a mega mushroom or simply laze in limpid waters under the glorious Whitsundays sun. Getting wet has never been so fun.

Why we love it Park activities aside (think on-site petting zoo, mini-golf, outdoor cinema, massage hut), the Whitsundays is an ideal setting for a family getaway, right on the doorstep of the Great Barrier Reef. Check in and enjoy breathtaking scenic drives, ocean rafting, snorkelling, segway tours, island hopping and local farmers' and craft markets.
adventurewhitsunday.com.au ●

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Serenity rules

Catherine Best checks into the brand-new BIG4 Rules Beach Holiday Park and discovers a quiet waterfront paradise, begging to be explored.

"Do you think anyone can see?" my eight-year-old son James asks as he fashions a handful of suds into a bubble beard. We're in a stone bathtub a short nudie-run from the beach and there's no one about to see. The outdoor bath is one of the biggest we've seen – almost plunge-pool proportions – and can be enclosed behind a swing gate, but there's no need. The closest town is a 15-minute drive inland and the handful of twilight amblers are more interested in the beach.

And what a beach it is. Fourteen kilometres of near-deserted golden sands bookended by two creeks and nuzzled by the shimmering expanse of the Coral Sea. BIG4 Rules Beach Holiday Park has struck the location jackpot. Set about 60 kilometres off the Bruce Highway, between Agnes Water and Bundaberg, the park occupies one of the most secluded coastal pockets of central Queensland. Popular with boaters, fishers and 4WDers, it's the kind of place where you roll in for a couple of days and end up staying a week.

Cabin comforts

The holiday park opened at the end of 2023 and, in our haste to visit, we've left our caravan at home and instead booked one of four beachfront glamping tents. Ours has sea views and is just a short hop to the water, over dunes fringed by a tract of littoral rainforest. Inside,

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> "The beach is accessible to 4WDs and one morning we join locals for an off-road adventure"

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there's a luxurious king-size bed, kitchenette and ensuite. But our favourite features are outside – the private deck where we play cards at sunset, a large fire pit where many a marshmallow is toasted under starry skies, and that bathtub.

The park has 85 powered sites on large, grassy plots, dedicated pet-friendly areas and ample room for boat parking. Park managers Dallas and Lisa Sheedy will even see to it you get your choice of morning or afternoon sun. The beauty of a new park is that the facilities can't be faulted. The amenities are sparkling clean (accessible included), the laundry has contactless payment (a boon for anyone who's ever scrounged around their bag for loose coins), and the large camp kitchen is so well-equipped, tent campers needn't bring a skerrick of cutlery or crockery. There's even a stash of kids' games. Outside, there's a communal fire pit where travel yarns are shared over sundowners while the kids scoot about

Green card

- *Recycling*
- *No single-use toiletries*

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01 Soaking up the views at Round Hill lookout 02 The glamping tents at BIG4 Rules Beach 03 Sleeping like kings in a glamping tent © BIG4 Rules Beach Holiday Park 04 Beach driving in Deepwater National Park 05 Beach play with barely another soul in sight 06 Pedal cart thrills. All other images © Catherine Best

on pedal carts. Plans are afoot for more cabins and a possible cafe and splash park.

Stepping out

Who needs artificial water play when you have the ocean at your doorstep? Not only is Rules Beach at the southernmost tip of the Great Barrier Reef (boat trips available from Agnes Water), it's also a nesting ground for loggerhead turtles, which come ashore to lay their eggs from November to March. We're outside turtle season, but there are many other treasures to be found. We stroll north along the beach to Finger Point, exploring rockpools alive with darting fish and skittering crabs. James swings from the skeleton fingers of tree branches that protrude from the sand, while I squint to spot whales on the horizon. South of the park is the mouth of Baffle Creek, a mangrove habitat teeming with enough fish to warrant the detour off the highway alone.

The beach is accessible to 4WDs (the entrance is just north of the holiday park), and one morning we join locals Tracy and Jon Oppelaar for an off-road adventure through Deepwater National Park. It's a thrilling ride as we bounce over gravel, swoosh through a water crossing and eventually hit soft sand, flanked by a forest of cabbage palms, paperbarks and flowering wattle. We make a pitstop at Wreck Beach, where waves foam into a rock pool, creating a natural jacuzzi, and take a rugged side track to a deserted beach. In Seventeen Seventy, we drive to the tip of the peninsula at Round Hill Headland, where a couple of short trails lead to twin lookouts perched high above the ocean.

On our last full day, we rise for sunset and watch a lone fisherman casting a line into the swell. We sit on the cool sand, enjoying the quiet serenity as the sun crests the horizon. It's a new day and we have the beach almost entirely to ourselves. ●

Do your homework

Rules Beach is 100 kilometres north of Bundaberg in QLD

rulesbeach.com.au

gladstoneregion.info

MEGA
BURGER
VAN

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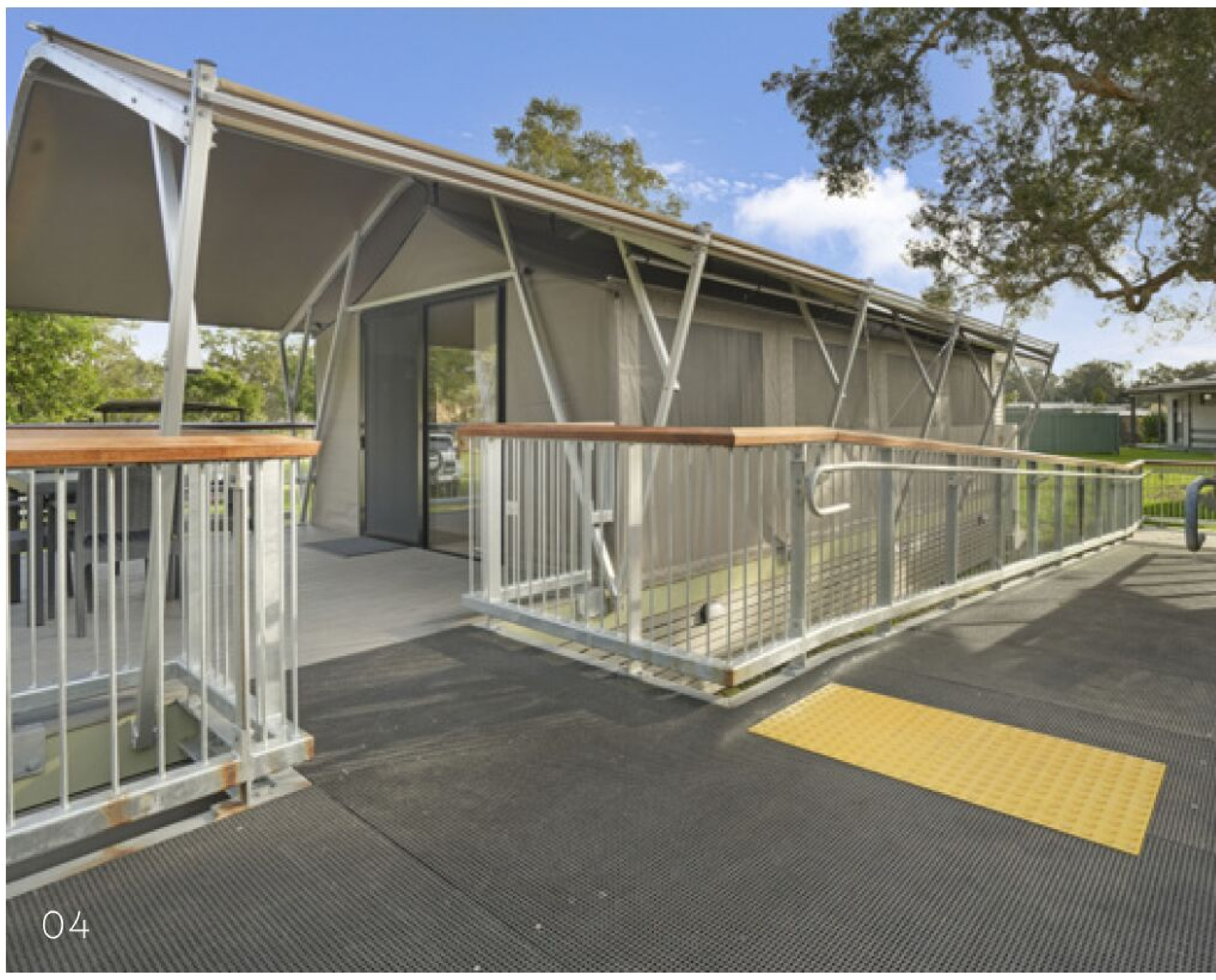
Access all areas



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Find the perfect blend of relaxation and adventure at Swansea Lakeside Holiday Park, where a focus on accessibility ensures there's plenty of fun for everyone, writes Eleanor Edstrom.

Fishing, splash pools, ninja parks… if endorphins are in order, Swansea Lakeside Holiday Park at Lake Macquarie has them in spades. And with a focus on accessibility, this kids' paradise ensures that everyone can join in the fun. According to a 2023 study by Tourism Research Australia, 23 per cent of all domestic trips are taken by travellers with accessibility needs. And with roughly one in five Australians living with a disability, the demand for accessible travel is high. Lake Macquarie Holiday Parks – comprised of five parks in the popular NSW holiday destination – is a champion of accessible stays, offering inclusive facilities to meet the needs of all guests.

One of the group's signature properties is Swansea Lakeside Holiday Park, a tranquil, tree-lined retreat nestled on the shores of the largest coastal saltwater lake in the Southern Hemisphere, less than two hours north of Sydney. The park's superb new safari tents are equal parts luxurious and inclusive, inviting all families to enjoy the thrill of glamping. The tents' accessible features include a wheelchair-friendly ramp, wide-entry sliding door and an accessible bathroom fitted out with grab bars and a roll-in shower. The spacious interiors allow people with accessibility needs to navigate the space comfortably. Blending thoughtful design, modern comforts and a strong connection to nature, the air conditioned luxury tents boast large outdoor decks overlooking the gorgeous Swansea Channel – perfect for those pinch-me holiday moments.

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01 Fun galore at Lake Macquarie Holiday Parks
02 Pedal power rules on holiday
03 Family moments matter most
04 The inclusive safari tents at Swansea Lakeside Holiday Park.
© All images Lake Macquarie Holiday Parks

The park also offers a selection of accessible two and three-bedroom villas, some featuring state-of-the-art automatic doors, motorised adjustable-height kitchen benchtops and cupboards, and remote-control operated blinds.

Creating lasting memories is easy with the park's bounty of inclusive family friendly facilities. Swansea Lakeside even hosts events to celebrate International Day of People with a Disability. Cool off in the solar-heated resort-style swimming pool, which has ramp access, an aquatic wheelchair and accessible amenities. Enjoy an adrenaline rush at the nearby playground, with an accessible spinner and nest swing. Or get your competitive spirit firing in the recreation precinct, which includes a tennis court, basketball court, ninja park and mini-golf course.

Swansea Lakeside Holiday Park's prime waterfront location is also ideal for picnics, fishing, swimming and relaxing on the grassy foreshore. Explore the lakefront via a flat concrete path and boardwalk that make the park's blissful setting enjoyable for all.

There's so much to enjoy here you may never want to leave the park, but the broader Lake Macquarie region beckons. Boasting 30 kilometres of scenic coastline, Lake Macquarie is home to a string of dazzling accessible surf beaches. Popular swimming spots such as Redhead Beach, Caves Beach and Blacksmiths Beach offer wheelchair-friendly facilities, including accessible parking, toilets and change rooms. During the patrol season (September to April), beach wheelchairs are available from the surf life saving clubs. For a more tranquil experience, visit Grannies Pool, a shallow inlet on the Swansea Channel breakwater near Blacksmiths Beach. Accessible pathways and beach matting make it easy to reach from the nearby car park. Alternatively, head to Belmont Baths where you can gently ease into the lake via a wide ramp that leads into a netted swimming enclosure. An amphibious wheelchair is available here, stored in an MLAK-accessible locker.

For families seeking adventure, embark on an inclusive sailing experience on Lake Macquarie with a stabilised boat guided by friendly volunteers at Sailability. The region's all-abilities playgrounds also guarantee a fun-filled day. Thomas H. Halton Park playground stands out with its access carousel, sensory garden, climbing structures and giant nest swing, while Speers Point Park's Variety Playground features a quiet zone, liberty swing and all-abilities play equipment.

Swansea Lakeside Holiday Park is just one of five Lake Macquarie Holiday Parks providing accessible getaways on NSW's breathtaking Hunter Coast. Each caters to diverse needs with thoughtfully designed accommodation options and facilities. Because everybody deserves a memorable and fulfilling holiday. ●

Do your homework

lakemacholidayparks.com.au
sailabilitynsw.com.au

BIG4 Gold Coast Holiday Park

HELENSVALE, QLD

Go karts, aqua tubes, campfire yarns, puppy pampering – you name it and you'll find it at BIG4 Gold Coast Holiday Park. Pumped with adrenaline and packed with convenience, this pet-friendly holiday park is a family fun extravaganza. Your only challenge will be deciding what to do first. Located amongst the thrills and spills of the Gold Coast's theme parks, BIG4 Gold Coast is a gateway to adventure and even has its own water park. Expect 317 metres of twirly-whirly waterslides, a colossal tipping bucket and more than 40 interactive play features for long-lasting giggles. Luxuriate in the 12-seater spa, enjoy a quick bite and a bevvy from the comfort of your poolside cabana, or savour a longer meal at Nibbles Terrace, a breezy alfresco dining area with a pizza oven.

The park ensures active families quickly find their holiday groove. There's a giant jumping pillow and an awesome eco-playground made from recycled plastics and ocean waste, featuring climbing structures, swings and rubber domes to help kids develop their motor skills and coordination. There's also a doggy day care for your furry family members.

Sleep Camp or enjoy some shut-eye in an interconnecting motel room, safari tent, terraced villa or cosy family cabin (accessible available).

Do Tick off the theme parks – the BIG4 is five minutes from Warner Bros. Movie World, Wet'n'Wild, Australian Outback Spectacular, Dreamworld and WhiteWater World.

Info *goldcoastholidaypark.com.au*

Gracetown Caravan Park

MARGARET RIVER, WA

Located along the stunning Margaret River coast, this holiday park is the stuff outdoor holiday dreams are made of. Just a five-minute drive from Gracetown's gorgeous white-sand beach, the caravan park offers a peaceful bush setting brimming with wildlife, including kookaburras, kangaroos and parrots.

Get set for excitement overdrive at the park's multitude of facilities. Cosy up by the mega movie screen under the stars, challenge your crew to an 18-hole game of mini-golf (free for all guests) or let the kids burn off energy at the jumping pad and playground. There's also a tennis, volleyball and basketball court for sports-mad kids.

While there's plenty to do on site, stepping out is so much fun. Whether you're into walking trails, wineries or waves, the park is a terrific base for exploring all the Margaret River region has to offer. Gracetown is one of a few towns located along the iconic Cape to Cape Track, making it an awesome HQ for keen hikers.

Sleep Take your pick of shady caravan and camping sites close to the amenities or opt for a hassle-free glamping tent, ensuite cabin or self-contained chalet – the latter is perfect for larger families. Sleep tight!

Do Hit the waves at Gracetown Beach, check out the local breweries or snap a selfie with the 42 life-sized fibreglass cows in the nearby town of Cowaramup.

Info *gracetowncaravanpark.com.au*

BIG4 Launceston Holiday Park

LAUNCESTON, TAS

Fancy wandering through dazzling lavender fields, or perhaps treating the kids to an unforgettable chairlift ride over a spectacular gorge? BIG4 Launceston Holiday Park is your one stop shop from which to explore the natural and cultural wonders of Northern Tasmania. Located in the heart of Launceston, the family friendly park is just a short walk from the city's attractions, from museums to the famous Cataract Gorge.

At home base you'll find a tonne of exciting things to do. The park offers a children's playground with swings, a climbing frame and a sandy area perfect for toddlers or older kids keen to kick around a soccer ball. Head to reception to pick up board games and puzzles, or to embark on free scavenger hunts supercharged with age-appropriate challenges and hidden clues.

The park also boasts an on-site providore stocked with local Tasmanian goodies, from gourmet treats to regional wines, as well as modern guest amenities and a convenient grocery delivery and storage service.

Stay From powered sites suitable for tents, swags and campers to accessible villas and luxury eight-person condos with modern furnishings, the park has an extensive range of accommodation to suit every group's needs.

Do Kids can get their bounce on at the giant jumping pillow or meet the resident wallabies and bandicoots that roam the park. Keen to venture further afield? There are endless day trip opportunities, such as world-class vineyards and beautiful nature reserves.

Info *big4launceston.com.au*

BIG4 Narooma Easts Holiday Park

NAROOMA, NSW

Grab a pair of sunnies and set your clock to coastal time. BIG4 Narooma Easts Holiday Park is a haven for sun and fun on NSW's stunning South Coast. Situated on the banks of the scenic Wagonga Inlet, there's plenty of opportunities to fish, kayak and cruise the turquoise waters.

The park boasts a range of fantastic facilities, ensuring everyone is a happy camper. Keen boaters will be glad to know there are fish freezers and nearby boat ramps, whereas kids will have a blast pedalling around on go-karts and battling it out on the life-size chess board. The park also has a spacious indoor spa, a 25-metre outdoor lagoon pool, and a vibrant indoor water wonderland with tipping buckets and slides that can be accessed by guests year-round. For even more fun, the little ones can check out the kids' club (think jellybeans, movies, colouring competitions and craft) during the school holidays. And for parents seeking the comforts of home while on the road, the well-kept kitchen amenities, TV room, laundry and outdoor gym have you covered.

Stay Good sleep comes easy when you get to bed down to the lull of crashing waves. The park offers camping and caravan sites (with an ensuite option for added privacy), along with safari glamping tents and a range of one to three-bedroom cabins and condos.

Do Take your time exploring the nearby local markets, scenic boardwalks, cycling paths and geological marvels around the park. The remarkable Australia Rock and Glasshouse Rocks are not to be missed!

Info *eastsnarooma.com.au*

Be inspired all year round with the latest family travel news, inspiration and ideas at…

holidayswithkids.com.au

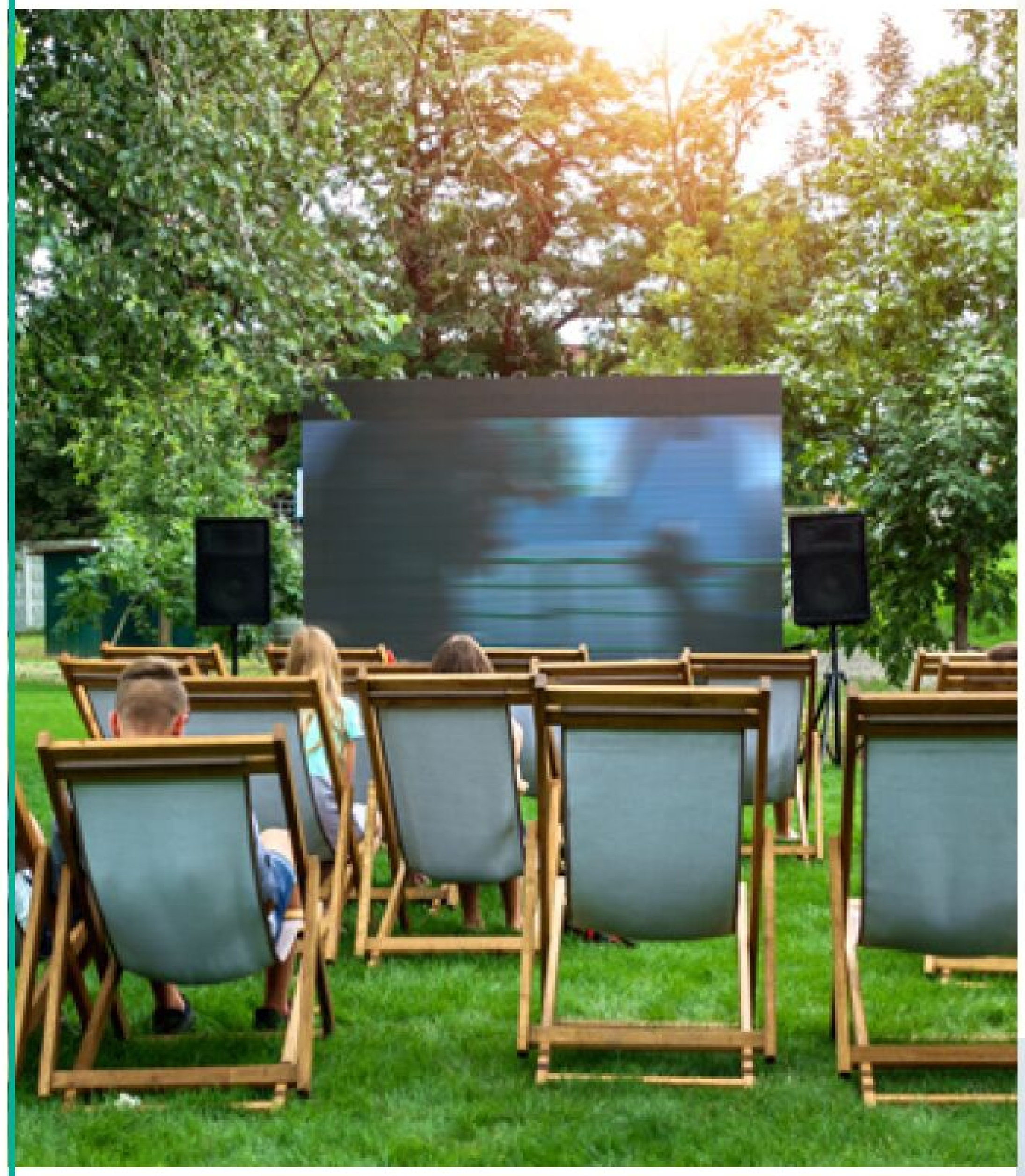
Scan the QR code to easily access these stories.

The ultimate Margaret River Region road trip itinerary

Giants, gnomes, hidden caves and not a drop of wine, Catherine Best enjoys a week-long family friendly Margaret River road trip in a motorhome.

🔍 margaret river

© Tourism Australia



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Australia's best Aboriginal tours and experiences for kids

Australia is home to the oldest continuous culture on Earth, and educational tours and experiences can be found all around Australia.

🔍 aboriginal tours

© Shutterstock

15 epic holiday parks with outdoor cinemas

Enjoy the magic of the movies under the stars at these holiday parks with outdoor cinemas across Australia and New Zealand.

🔍 outdoor cinemas

© Tourism Australia

40 best winter camping spots in Australia

Whether you love snuggling up around a fire on a cool night or heading north to soak up the sunshine, your kids will love these campgrounds in winter.

🔍 winter camping

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On the road

88
Soft camping around Australia

94
Vanning in Warrnambool

98
Brooke Hanson's top campsites

100
Decoding your camping style

© Tourism and Events Queensland

Camp convert

Love a family getaway but not keen on sleeping in a tent or caravan? These unique digs provide a gentle introduction to camping that will soon win the family over, writes Catherine Best.

Quokka glamping ROTTNEST ISLAND, WA

Ever woken up to a quokka munching on the grass outside your tent? Unless you've overnighted on Rottnest Island the answer is no, because it doesn't happen anywhere else on the planet. Discovery Resorts – Rottnest Island has the pick of locations on Rotto, tucked behind the dunes of the insanely photogenic Pinky Beach. The park has 83 ensuite glamping tents, including spacious five-person family tents that come with a king-size bed, bunks and trundle. Rates include breakfast at Pinky's restaurant overlooking the beach and access to the stunning lagoon pool. The resort is an ideal base for exploring the island's 63 beaches, two lighthouses and heritage train. *discoveryholidayparks.com.au*

Waterfront wonders

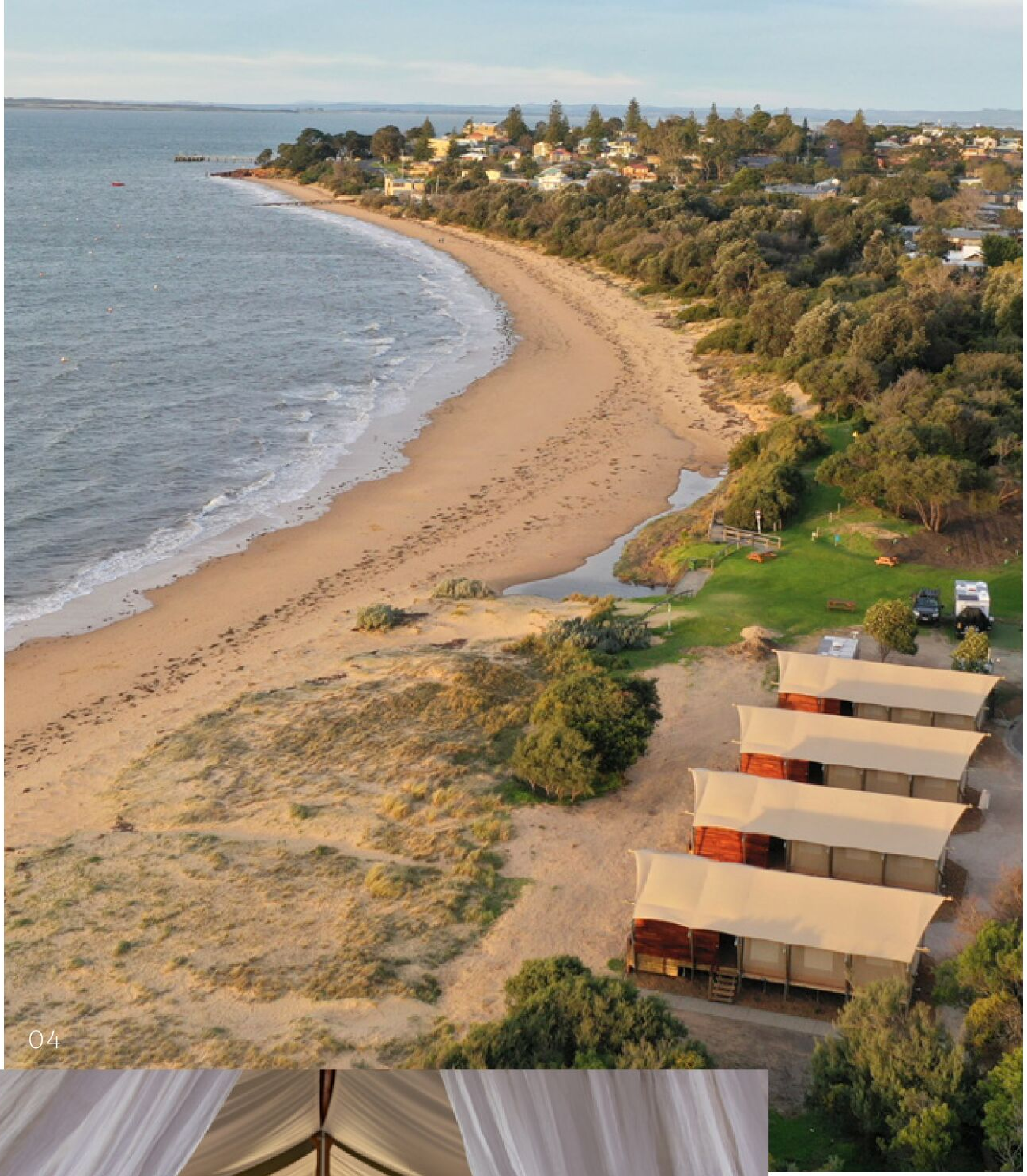
PHILLIP ISLAND, VIC

If you thought waterfront alfresco baths were strictly for high-end hotels, think again. NRMA Phillip Island Beachfront Holiday Park is redefining the modern caravan park with its safari tents. The tents have prime position a few paces from the water overlooking tranquil Western Port Bay and comfortably sleep four, with an ensuite, kitchenette and huge deck. Whip up an Italian feast in the communal wood-fired pizza oven, pedal to the tourist village of Cowes on an e-bike, and don't forget to visit the Penguin Parade. *nrmaparksandresorts.com.au*

Glam tram

HEALESVILLE, VIC

Why stay in a cabin when you can snore in an old W Class Melbourne tram? At the BIG4 Yarra Valley Park Lane Holiday Park in Healesville, two 1930s trams are enjoying a tree-change retirement after being converted into quirky three-bedroom abodes. Each sleeps eight and has a gleaming galley kitchen, large adjoining lounge, outdoor deck and a hot tub. The park is packed with kids' facilities and Healesville Sanctuary is close by. *parklaneholidayparks.com.au*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01 Glamping on Rottnest Island © Discovery Parks Rottnest Island 02 Sleeping in a tram at BIG4 Yarra Valley Park Lane Holiday Park 03 Slumber Safari tent at Werribee Open Range Zoo © Jo Howell/Zoos Victoria 04 NRMA Beachfront Holiday Park Phillip Island

02

Airstream glamping

BRISBANE, QLD

What do Jimmy Barnes, Matthew McConaughey and a bunch of ex-US presidents have in common? They all own Airstream trailers, and at Brisbane Holiday Village you can bed down in a groovy 'silver bullet' too. The park has two pimped-out Airstreams, Maisie and Betsy, that both sleep four and come with a private ensuite bathroom and enclosed courtyard complete with a barbecue area, lounge and enormous 75-inch outdoor TV. The swimming pool, tennis court, mini-golf, playground and basketball court seal the deal. *brisbaneholidayvillage.com.au*

Beachside bliss

HASTINGS POINT, NSW

Water-loving families are spoilt for choice at Tweed Holiday Parks Hastings Point, idyllically situated between the beach and Cudgera Creek. Book a Bombora Surfari Tent and switch your watch to holiday time as you soak up the serenity on your private deck. Your accommodation is a tent in name only and will leave the family wanting for nothing, with a queen-size bed, bunks, ensuite, kitchenette, flat-screen TV and air conditioning. Outside, a long, glinting swathe of beach awaits, and you might even spot a whale. *tweedholidayparks.com.au*

05 Bellwether Wines glamping © Catherine Best 06 Glamping in nature at Mount Tamborine Glades 07 Mashmallow toasting on Cockatoo Island © Jamie Williams Photography

Slumber Safari

MELBOURNE, VIC

Why camp in the Aussie bush when you can sleep under canvas on the African savannah, falling asleep to a lion's roar? You won't need a passport for this Slumber Safari, which takes place at Werribee Open Range Zoo, right on the western fringe of Melbourne. The five-person canvas lodges are perched over a sprawling animal enclosure, so the family can view roaming giraffes and ostriches over sundowners on the balcony. Stays include an African-themed dinner, breakfast, after-hours zoo access, a safari tour and perhaps even an up-close encounter with a rhino and hippos. *zoo.org.au/werribee*

Cockatoo Island camping

SYDNEY, NSW

Did you know it's possible to camp in the heart of Sydney Harbour? On this unique island camping adventure, the family can watch the sunset on the Harbour Bridge, hear ghost stories, roast marshmallows on the campfire and catch an evening flick on the big screen in a historic loft. Cockatoo Island has family tents on the waterfront, providing an ideal base for exploring the World Heritage-listed site, formerly a convict prison and ship-building yard. Don't miss the clifftop walk and tunnels. *cockatooisland.gov.au*

Rustic farm feels

COONAWARRA, SA

In a South Australian sheep paddock near the Victorian border, you'll find Bellwether Wines, an enchanting respite from the harried pace of family life. The property is the passion project of winemaker Sue Bell, who has transformed an 1868 shearing shed into a rustic, convivial space for adults and kids alike. In the paddock, you'll find a clutch of bell tents on raised wooden platforms serenaded by a flock of bleating sheep. While mums and dads can partake in a wine tasting, the kids will fulfil their farmyard fantasies chasing the chooks and sheep, spotting highland cows and swinging from the treehouse swing. *bellwetherwines.com.au*

Rainforest thrills

MOUNT TAMBORINE, QLD

When is a nature glamping stay a full theme park experience? When you get to fossick in the dirt for genuine thunderegg crystals, zip through the treetops on Australia's largest high-ropes course and get behind the controls of a mini-excavator. Tamborine Mountain Glades in the Gold Coast hinterland is a campground, luxury retreat, nature space and adrenaline park all rolled into one. Check in to a Woodlands Family Luxe Tent with a private plunge pool and get set for long days of fun and adrenaline rushes on the banks of Cedar Creek. Did someone say laser skirmish in the rainforest? *tamborinemountainglades.com.au*

Power into nature

Whether you're towing a caravan for a weekend getaway or heading off road to explore uncharted terrain, the Mitsubishi Pajero Sport has you covered.

There are few things more freeing than hitting the road in a car that will take you almost anywhere. Whether you crave a weekend off-roading in nature or a smooth-riding chariot with all the bells and whistles, every type of family holiday is possible with an SUV built for adventure. The Mitsubishi Pajero Sport is a dependable family vehicle that will take you anywhere you dare – in style. Seamlessly blending 4WD capability with the comfort needed for long highway drives, this versatile SUV has everything active families need for excursions into the great outdoors.

Under the hood, the Pajero Sport is powered by a robust 2.4-litre MiVEC Turbo engine, delivering an impressive 150kW of power and 470Nm of torque. This powerhouse is paired with a towing capacity of 3.1 tonnes, making it an ideal vehicle for medium-sized caravans or camper trailers. Its Super Select 4WD-II all-wheel control system with five off-road modes (gravel, snow/mud, sand and rock) ensures drivers can tackle any terrain with ease and confidence.

As any outdoor-loving family knows, reliability is key when hitting the road, whether you're on bitumen or gravel. While many manufacturers talk the talk, Mitsubishi walks the walk. Offering Australia's only joint 10-year warranty and 10 years' capped-price servicing, the Pajero Sport can be depended on for years of beach, camping and bush-bashing escapades.

For families who spend a lot of time on the road, the Pajero also shines when it comes to space and comfort. The plush interior accommodates up

01 Mitsubishi Pajero Sport on holiday (GSR model shown with optional accessories)

to seven family members (plus the four-legged ones!), camping gear and the kids' favourite holiday toys without feeling cramped. The driver's seat power lumbar adjustment ensures ergonomic comfort and support during long journeys while finishes, such as the three-spoke leather steering wheel and two-tone burgundy/black leather seating in the GSR model, balance style with functionality. The Pajero Sport's enhanced design extends to the exterior with a revised grille, bumper garnishes, black headlamp extensions and bold 18" wheels that showcase its go-anywhere attitude.

Technology drives your in-car experience. Expect heated front seats, hands-free functionality, an eight-inch customisable digital display with music and navigation, plus seamless CarPlay smartphone integration. Precious cargo is protected with passive and active safety systems such as obstruction detection, automatic braking, blind spot warning, lane change assist and adaptive cruise control. Whether you need a run-about-town vehicle that can handle school pick-ups and playdates, or a rugged machine for exploring Australia's remote corners, this versatile 4WD toes the line between performance and practicality.

Built for families who crave freedom, the Mitsubishi Pajero Sport is more than just an SUV – it's an invitation to explore the world without sacrificing life's little luxuries.
mitsubishi-motors.com.au ●

West side story

A long weekend on Victoria's Shipwreck Coast is more fun when your caravan beats you to the holiday park, writes Catherine Best.

02

01

Like a pot of gold at the bottom of the rainbow, Warrnambool is a hidden treasure at the end of the Great Ocean Road. While many road trippers bypass the town (the road technically ends 12 kilometres east of here), they're missing out. Home to migrating whales, rugged sea cliffs, golden beaches and a storied maritime history, Warrnambool is the jewel of Western Victoria. For kids, this seaside town is a place of shipwreck tales, wildlife encounters and salty adventures, all wrapped in the scars of volcanoes past.

Setting up camp

Rain is falling when we arrive in Warrnambool and, after a long drive, I'm relieved there's no work to be done. We've left our caravan at home for a girls' long weekend away – my 10-year-old daughter, her school pal and me – and have opted to hire a caravan (delivered) from Camplify. This means two things: the van is all set up and ready to go when we arrive – no unhitching in the wet – and we can sightsee on the way without the burden of parking a 22ft caravan. This enables us to make an ice cream pitstop at Graze the Day festival in Timboon and check out the new accessible lookout at the 12 Apostles.

We're staying at Surfside Holiday Park, tucked behind the dunes at Lady Bay. It's a huge council-run park with sparkling clean amenities. Not that we need them.

03

Our hired home on wheels is better equipped than your average holiday villa. Camplify has more than 11,000 RVs available for rent nationwide, and finding the perfect fit – in the right location – for our weekend escape was easy via the user-friendly booking platform. 'Molly' is a year-old Canyon Caravans van with a comfy queen-size bed, rear double bunks and ensuite. The owners provide a thorough handover and are on call 10 minutes down the road if we need anything. There's also a very orderly laminated cheat sheet, 'Molly's Whereabouts', that tells us where to find everything, including the Ninja blender, which the girls soon sniff out to make smoothie bowls.

Exploring the foreshore

Surfside is front and centre of Warrnambool's main attractions, set between the beach and Flagstaff Hill Maritime Village, off a long boulevard lined with Norfolk pine trees. Across the road is Lake Pertobe – an eight-hectare adventure playground (accessible from an underpass) with flying foxes, huge slides, a maze and paddle-boat hire. A paved foreshore traces the bay, linking Logan's Beach whale nursery in the east and the Breakwater in the west. Here, we find the Pavilion, a waterfront cafe with wraparound windows peering out across the water. While Molly leaves us wanting for nothing, we can't resist brekkie here, watching shiny-backed racehorses bob through the water while downing generous plates of avo and pancakes.

The breakwater is at the tip of a narrow peninsula. On the eastern side

Camplify lowdown

Hiring hero

Camplify is the Airbnb of camping. The platform has more than 11,000 caravans, motorhomes, campervans, camper trailers – and even tow vehicles – available for rent through a nationwide network of RV owners.

Where to?

Camplify can take you almost anywhere you want to go. Work out where you want to holiday, choose your preferred camping style and decide if you want to pick up and drive/tow your RV or have it delivered.

The fine print

Just like hiring a car, Camplify comes with insurance. You can opt to reduce your excess for an increased fee to give extra peace of mind.

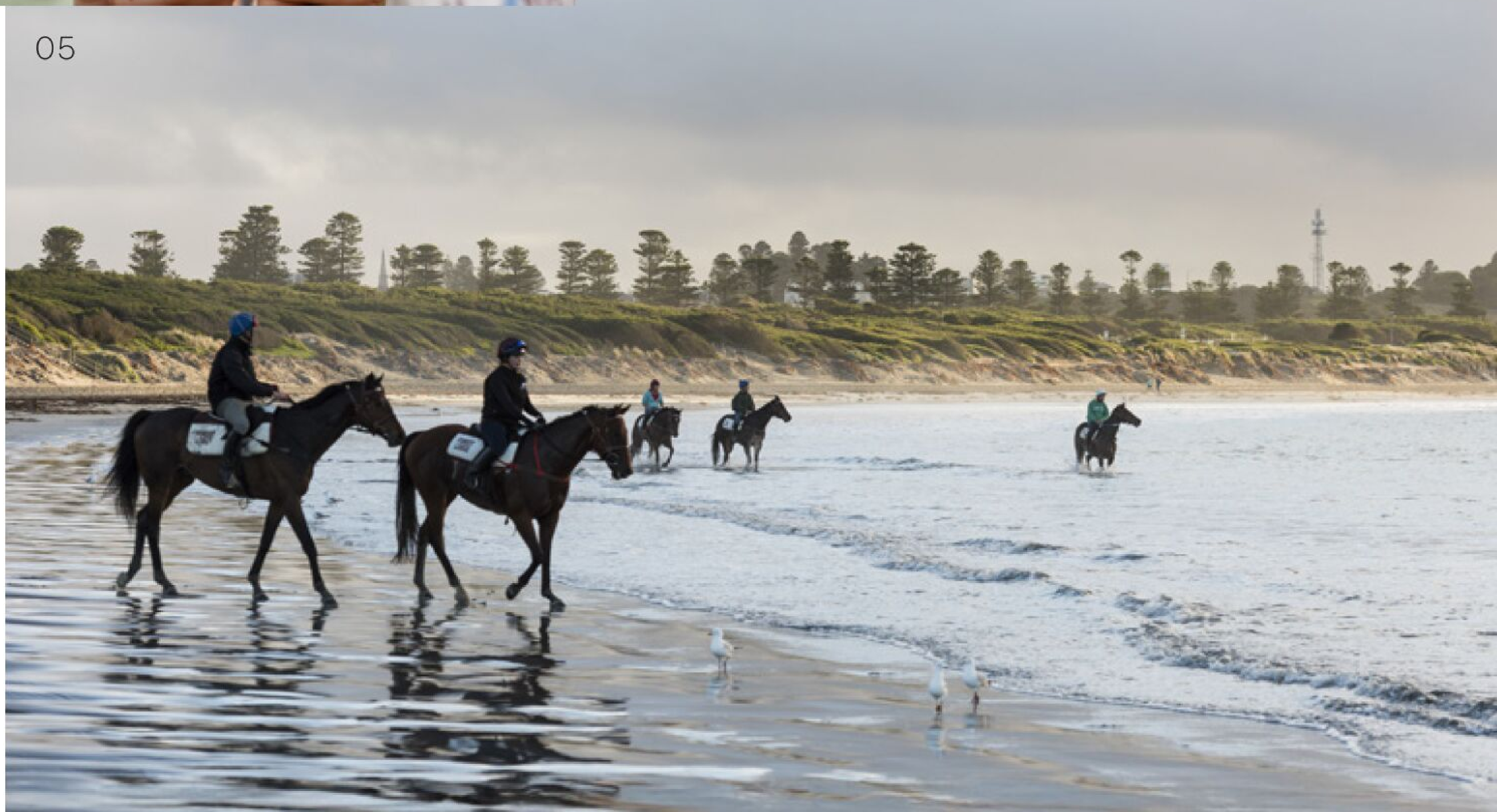
Handover d-yay!

Meet your host at the designated place and time for a thorough handover. Any extras agreed to prior, like linen, will be ready for you to enjoy. Sit back, relax and have a great holiday. *camplify.com.au*

Green card

- *Recycling*

04



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is the protected curve of Lady Bay, to the west is open ocean blunted by two small rocky islands where the Merri River drains into the sea. It's not swimming weather, so we retreat to Deep Blue Hot Springs, an outdoor sanctuary of 15 geothermal mineral pools. We flit between aromatherapy pools, sensory caves and trickling rainforest grottoes, heated between 36°C and 40°C. The cold plunge snatches my breath away, but even the girls jump in – with a squeal. On the western side of the peninsula, we cross Stingray Bay over a footbridge at the mouth of Merri River, following a boardwalk with views across to Middle and Merri islands. We stop at a rocky beach to poke around in rockpools at low tide and explore hidden sea caves, finding starfish and startling crabs. After a quick pub meal at The Cally Hotel, we make it to Thunder Point, a windswept clifftop gnawed by the ocean, for sunset. When we get back to Surfside, our Camplify home on wheels is toasty and dry and there's just time for a round of cards before snuggling into bed.

BOND STORE
C. JEWELL'S
STEAM PACKET INN

06

07

Cultural curiosities

This stretch of the Victorian coastline is known as the Shipwreck Coast, thanks to the treacherous seas that condemned more than 800 ships to a watery grave. At Flagstaff Hill Maritime Village, we step back in time to learn about the perilous journeys made by early European settlers. We learn about the two survivors of the Loch Ard, wrecked in 1878, and see salvaged artefacts, including the extraordinary Minton Peacock, an intricate glazed statue as tall as the girls, which miraculously survived the wreck. Outside, we're transported to an 1870s village of cobblestone streets and ye olde shoppes, presided over by two lighthouses, canons and a clutch of alpacas. The girls like the vintage lolly shop best and leave with pockets full of sweets. We return twice to meet the penguin-protecting Maremma dogs of Middle Island, made famous in the kids' movie *Oddball*, and to see the sound and light show *Tales of the Shipwreck Coast*, a 4D storytelling of Warrnambool's whaling years and the Loch Ord shipwreck. When the weather turns, we find wet-weather entertainment at the Warrnambool Art Gallery, which is showing an exhibition on US street artist Claw Money and has a swag of free craft activities, where we colour-in paper sneakers and make yarn animals.

At Tower Hill, just out of town, we explore a system of peaks, craters, lakes and lava flows, remnants of a dormant volcano. The Lava Tongue Boardwalk meanders through wetlands bristling with burping frogs, and in the picnic area – patrolled by emus – we spot a koala scratching in the eucalypts. Further west, we visit Budj Bim Cultural Landscape, Australia's newest World Heritage site, where the Gunditjmara People developed a complex system of channels, dams and weirs to trap and harvest kooyang (short-finned eel) for more than 6,000 years. We learn how the eels travel to New Caledonia to spawn, their young using an in-built GPS to make the five-month journey back to Budj Bim alone.

Our journey home to Melbourne only takes three hours. Much quicker than if we had to tow the caravan. Thank you, Camplify! ●

Do your homework

Warrnambool is a three-hour drive west of Melbourne. Camplify has a range of caravans, motorhomes and camper trailers for rent, some available for delivery. Surfside Holiday Park offers more than 500 sites, as well as beach chalets and cottages.

camplify.com.au
warrnambool.com
visitgreatoceanroad.org.au
surfsidepark.com.au
pavilion.net.au *thedeepblue.com.au*
flagstaffhill.com *thewag.com.au*
callyhotel.com.au *budjbim.com.au*

01 Warrnambool glistens on the shores of Lady Bay © Visit Victoria 02 Camplify makes caravanning easy 03 Chilling out at the hot springs 04 Ice-cream is a winner in Timboon 05 Racehorses training at Lady Bay © Visit Victoria 06 The cobbled streets of Flagstaff Hill Maritime Village 07 Meeting the Maremmas. All other images © Catherine Best

01

Destination gold

From the ocean to the outback, Olympic swimmer Brooke Hanson shares her top five camping destinations.

04

Crescent Head NSW

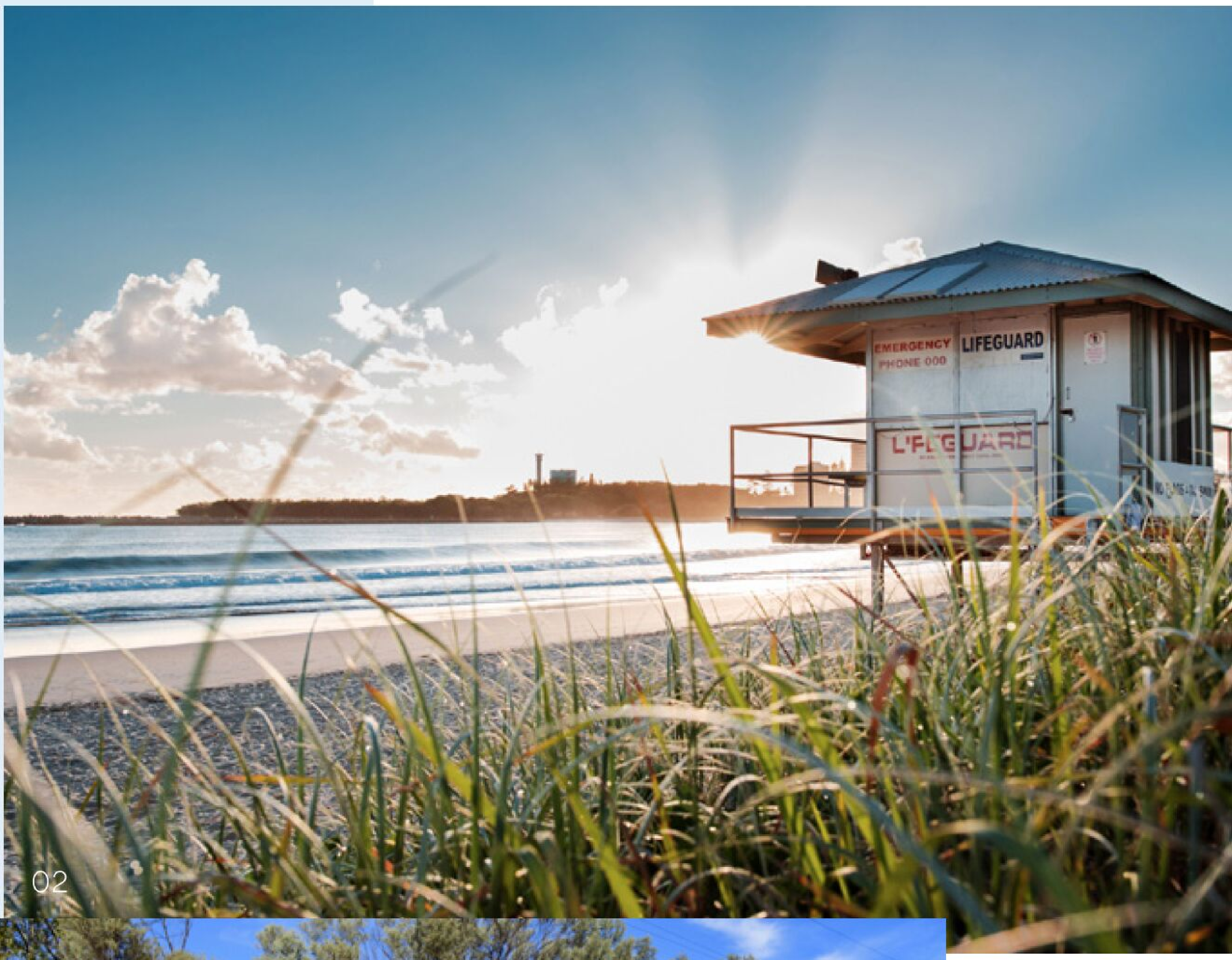
My favourite location at any time of the year is Crescent Head. I love this quaint coastal town just outside Kempsey on the NSW North Coast as it ticks all the boxes for everything my family wants on a holiday: sun, surf, sand and sleep. You can set up camp on the surf side of Crescent Head Holiday Park or the creek side. We love surfside as it's close to the waves and we can hear the ocean all night. It has the best longboard waves and a world-famous point break. There's a huge opening from the ocean to Killick Creek, which, at high tide, is great for floating with the current on your back or swimming against the tide.

01 Crescent Head is a great spot for kayaking © Macleay Valley Coast 02 Sunrise at Mooloolaba Beach © Hayley Williamson Photography/Tourism and Events Queensland 03 The WWII Secret Base tour is a must do in Charleville © Global Headquarters/Tourism and Events Queensland 04 Ballina Head Lookout, NSW © Shutterstock

Crescent Head has a fantastic surf beach for body surfing and board riding, plenty of sand to build sandcastles and heaps of spots to stay protected from the wind on a blowy day. Fishing at dawn or dusk is a must and the flathead are plentiful. There's a kids' play area right next to where the pelicans visit, and plenty of walks, including out to the headland for sunrise and sunset. *macleayvalleycoast.com.au*

Coffs Harbour NSW

Coffs Harbour is my second home; my family comes from Coffs and I've been holidaying there my entire life. We go every year to compete in the Coffs Coast Ocean Swims event. The town offers so much, from beautiful beaches and great surf breaks to lush hinterland. Floating down Coffs Creek at high tide is a blast. We like to pump yabbies for bait and there are plenty of fish to be caught in the mouth of the creek. Don't miss the tourist hotspots, including the Big Banana, dolphins at Coffs Coast Wildlife Sanctuary and the walking trails of Bruxner park and Muttonbird Island. *coffscoast.com.au*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Sunshine Coast QLD

What I love about the Sunshine Coast is the sun, surf and sand. There are so many activities to experience: surfing, fishing, playing golf, whale watching, visiting Australia Zoo and much more. Topping my list of must-dos are dining at one of the many surf clubs, shopping at the local markets (hello, Eumundi), and visiting the Ginger Factory, Underwater World, Aussie World and Ettamogah Pub. When heading for the hinterland, aim for the three Ms: Montville, Maleny and Mapleton, as each village is packed with old-world charm. My favourite pockets of coastline are Mooloolaba, Alexandra Headland, Coolum and Caloundra. *visitsunshinecoast.com*

Ballina NSW

Ballina is still an unspoilt gem. Part of the NSW Northern Rivers region, this coastal destination is situated on the Richmond River and still has a sleepy-town feel. I love being surrounded by water. When camping or caravanning by Shaws Bay Lake you have easy access to the surf and the river to swim, fish and stand-up paddleboard. You can even kayak down to the pub for dinner! I love Ballina for its simplicity – it gives you everything you could want from a holiday by the water without all the touristy hype of many other beachside destinations. *discoverballina.com.au*

Charleville QLD

For a girl who loves the coast and the ocean, I absolutely adore outback Queensland. You get the true-blue outback experience with camp oven dinners, lamb and pork spit roasts and, of course, the yabby races! The Charleville night sky is incredible and best enjoyed at the Cosmos Centre and observatory (stargazing peaks between June and September). I also enjoy fishing, seeing the weather balloon released, visiting the Royal Flying Doctor Service Visitor Centre and learning wartime secrets on the WWII Secret Base tour. *experiencecharleville.com.au*

IRONMAN 4x4
RUISER
SAHARA
·437

Finding your camping groove

Tent or camper trailer, campervan or caravan? There are so many camping styles on the market. Here, Catherine Best helps decode the options.

Gone are the days of the humble canvas tent. Today's camping families have a swathe of set-ups to choose between. From pitched abodes and driveable homes on wheels to towables, there's something for every fancy and budget. Here are the pros and cons of the most popular family camping set-ups. What type of camper are you?

Tenter

This is the entry-level option where every fledgling camper starts. Cheap and beginner-friendly, tents are excellent for newbies and occasional family campers. You can pick up a tent for less than the cost of a trolley full of groceries, and today's brands offer black-out features, instant-up designs, detachable rooms for growing families and leak-proof materials (no more flooded sleeping bags!).

Pros Tents are relatively cheap, easy to store and versatile. You can upgrade as the family grows without having to remortgage the house. They are a take-anywhere option that comes in a range of sizes, brands and designs.

Cons There's significant set-up and pack-down required with a tent, not just in the physical structure itself but also in organising the requisite gear, such as mattresses, bedding and cooking equipment. It can be challenging getting all your equipment into the car and keeping it neat and organised. Sometimes a trailer and storage solutions are required. You're also much more exposed to the elements (and insects) when camping in a tent. If it rains on the last day of your holiday, you are packing up in the wet and will need to dry out your gear when you get home.

Rooftop roamer

The penthouse of canvas camping, rooftop tents get you off the ground in a quicker and more secure set-up than a regular tent. These days, some rooftop tents can accommodate up to four people and are suitable for young families. This is a great option for parents who want a bit of separation between the tribe and the campground grit.

Pros A step up from a tent, you can sleep in your secure eyrie above the campground. Rooftop tents have easy set-up and pack-down functions within their own pod, which frees up the inside of the car for camping gear.
Cons You'll need to pack down the tent for day trips, which can be inconvenient unless you choose to mount it on a trailer. Rooftop tents can be a safety issue for children, who might have difficulty navigating the ladder. They are also more expensive than ordinary tents and require some installation and storage.

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Trailer traveller

Canvas on wheels is a big upgrade from a humble tent. With a camper trailer you get to sleep off the ground on a proper mattress and all your cooking and storage facilities are built in. Forget about bringing a separate fridge, cooktop and bedding gear, modern camper trailers come with all this and more. Some even have detachable shower and toilet annexes.
Pros There's less set-up and preparation required with a camper trailer than a tent as all your cooking and sleeping gear is already packed and ready to go. Camper trailers have the feel of a caravan without the towing weight and expense. They also pack down for compact storage in a garage or carport.
Cons Compact comes with a cost and while camper trailers can be much quicker to set up than a tent, they require a lot more work than a caravan. Traditional camper trailers still entail setting up poles, awnings and guy ropes. You will also need to store the camper somewhere, be adept at towing, and make sure your vehicle has enough towing capacity if the camper is large and heavy.

Caravan kid

Caravans have the benefit of a solid roof and walls to keep you dry and comfortable year-round. Perfect for spontaneous getaways, they're a ready-to-go home on wheels, with many boasting comforts such as ensuite bathrooms, washing machines and even dishwashers. Some caravans can sleep up to seven and have plenty of storage for toys, bikes and other kiddie paraphernalia. They are a great choice for families who do a lot of road travelling (hello, big lappers) and don't like to rough it.
Pros Caravans are all about comfort, convenience and spontaneity. Grab a change of clothes and some food, and you're ready to launch for a weekend away at short notice.
Cons Caravans are big, heavy, expensive and require towing nous. It's not unusual for today's modern family vans to tip the scales at 3.5 tonnes. That requires a large tow vehicle and towing expertise. You will also need somewhere secure to store the caravan when it's not in use. Some campgrounds are unsuitable for large caravans, thanks to tight bends and low-hanging branches.

Hybrid holidaymaker

The perfect compromise between a camper trailer and a full-size van, hybrid caravans combine the comfort of sleeping indoors with an outdoor cooking set-up. Some have pop-out sleeping compartments and pop-top roofs to create extra indoor space without increasing your footprint on the road.
Pros Hybrids are lighter and more compact than a full-size caravan but can still accommodate the whole family in comfort, indoors.
Cons Space is at more of a premium in a hybrid. There's less storage and more set-up required than for a full-size caravan. You also need to consider towing and storage.

Motorhome munchkin

Perfect for non-towers, a motorhome is basically a car and caravan in one. The bigger models (campervans are smaller versions) come with all the creature comforts of a caravan

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01 IRONMAN 4x4 rooftop tent © IRONMAN 4x4 02 Campervanning at Mission Beach © Narelle Bouveng/Tourism and Events Queensland 03 NRMA Ocean Beach Holiday Resort © Alexandra Adoncello/Destination NSW 04 BIG4 Koala Shores Port Stephens Holiday Park © Dee Kramer/Destination NSW

without the towing stress. Some motorhomes sleep up to six and have all the cooking and bathroom facilities and storage you would expect in a caravan. The kids also get a buzz out of sitting at the dining table (in seatbelts) while the motorhome is in motion.

Pros Other than plugging in power and water, motorhomes come with absolutely zero structural set-up. There's no hitching and unhitching to worry about, and reversing into a site is relatively easy without a pivoting trailer. It's just like Barbie's Dream Camper, minus the pool!

Cons Forgot the milk? Your home is your car and you'll have to take it with you. Taking your house EVERYWHERE you go can be frustrating. Camping in a motorhome/campervan requires some planning and organisation. Finding large parking spots on day excursions can be tricky – especially in national parks – and most motorhomes don't have robust off-road capability.

Swagger

When the kids get bigger, swags are a great option to give growing teens their own space. A swag won't replace your entire family camping set-up but it might enable you to downsize. Parents can enjoy a couples' caravan and the rugrats can revel in some independence outside. Swags generally sleep one to two people (convince the kids to share) and come with a convenient rolled-up mattress and bedding. It's drover-style camping under canvas – and the watchful eye of mums and dads. ●

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Home on wheels

Combining the comforts of home with the thrill of the open road, Motorhome Republic helps families find their ideal moving holiday with its range of international campervan hires.

Whether you're parked by a sun-drenched beach in Esperance, chasing waterfalls in North Queensland or exploring dramatic fjords in New Zealand, a Motorhome Republic holiday makes every road trip epic. A home on wheels brings you closer to nature with the convenience of having everything you need with you – all the time. Unpack once, then set and forget. Feel like stopping for lunch? Pull over and put the kettle on. Kids need a nap? Tuck them in while you catch some rays outside. Not sure if it's going to be warm or wet? No problem – raincoats, swimwear, jackets, buckets and spades are all with you. Every minute of the day. Hire a motorhome and never again fret about leaving something behind on a day out. You also don't have to worry about towing, and half the excitement *really* is in the journey. When else can the kids sit belted-up at the dining table playing board games while you streak across the outback?

Motorhomes are the ultimate ride to freedom, and they save a pretty penny, too. Forget expensive hotels and wallet-draining restaurants. In a motorhome, you can free and low-cost camp and self-cater. Eat what you want, when and where you want. Midnight snack in the Tasmanian wilderness? Done. Ice cream in the middle of the Central Australian desert? You betcha!

But where do you get your hands on a motorhome that is the perfect fit for your family, and how do you clinch the best deal? Forget about scrolling through endless rental sites and make a beeline for Motorhome Republic, an online booking platform that makes it easy to search and compare thousands of motorhome and

thule
truma
apollo

> “A home on wheels brings you closer to nature with the convenience of having everything you need with you”

01 Loving the #vanlife 02 A motorhome takes you almost anywhere your heart desires

campervan rentals in more than 50 countries. Between Australia, New Zealand, the US, Canada and Europe, the possibilities for incredible road trips are endless. Four berth, six berth, ensuite, pet friendly – Motorhome Republic has them all, tapping into a suite of trusted brands, including Apollo, Maui, Britz and Cheapa Campa.

The booking platform offers convenient pick-up and drop-off options, making family road trips as seamless as possible. This means you have the flexibility to travel at your own pace and take your time delving deeper into your destination – be it the Great Ocean Road or the stunning Hunter Valley. Plus, there’s no risk of missing a bus or train and having irritable kids while you wait for the next one (phew)!

Use Motorhome Republic's handy comparison tool to compare thousands of motorhomes across dozens of brands and find great deals to secure your best ride. Check out the latest offers and if you're new to motorhome rental, chat with the friendly customer support team to find out what option works for you.

It's always road trip season with Motorhome Republic – your one-stop-shop for family road trips. Book today, using the promo code 'FAMILY50' for $50 off motorhome rental (T&Cs apply), and there’s no telling where you might go. *motorhomerepublic.com* ●

Call of nature

There's no mod con more essential than a private loo while immersing yourself in the beauty of Australia's great outdoors.

For more than 60 years, Thetford Australia has been at the forefront of making camping and caravanning holidays convenient and enjoyable for adventurous families. As a global market leader in mobile sanitation, refrigeration and kitchen appliances tailored to the RV lifestyle, Thetford has become a trusted household name among happy campers – particularly those who don't enjoy hole-in-the-dirt loo stops.

When it comes to camping essentials, Thetford's Porta Potti range is indispensable for modern campers. These portable toilets are designed for families who value comfort and practicality. Compact and lightweight, Porta Potties are easy to transport and don't require a connection to drainage or water systems, making them perfect for outdoor adventures in caravans, campervans, camper trailers and tents. Features such as ergonomic seating, a high-capacity waste-holding tank, and an efficient flushing system provide convenience wherever your travels take you. Better yet, they're odour-free and, in addition to Thetford's range of built-in cassette toilets, are a must-have accessory for any off-grid camping adventure.

To keep your travelling loo in peak condition, stock up on Thetford's premium toilet care products. With more than 14 products available, from additives that break down waste and neutralise odours to grey water tank cleaners and maintenance solutions, Thetford ensures your camping set-up remains clean, fresh and hassle-free – no matter your destination. Whether you're setting up by the beach, deep in the bush or smack-bang in the middle of the outback, a reliable Porta Potti ensures kids and parents answering nature's call enjoy all the comforts of home, wherever they roam. Simply choose the loo that works for you from the extensive Thetford range, and decide if you need a floor plate, carry bag or Hold Down Kit to complete your road-worthy restroom. *thetford.com.au* ●

01 The Thetford Porta Potti range has every type of camper covered

Off-grid

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4WD family fun on K'gari

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Dark sky camping

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Hike the Three Capes Track

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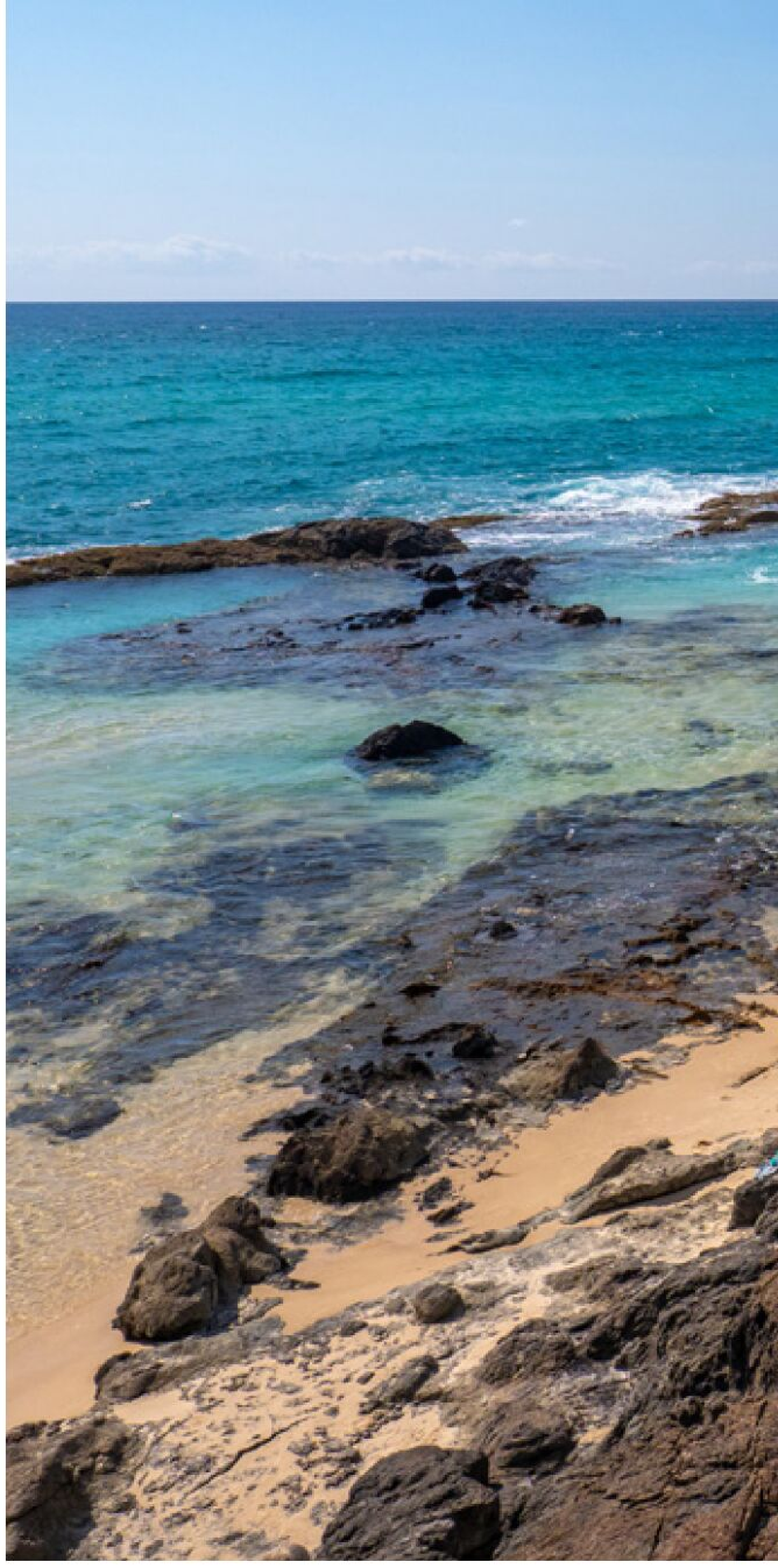
Open fire camp cooking

© Tourism and Events Queensland

4WD sandcation

Exploring K'gari with his kids, Chris Stead discovers the world's largest sand island is teeming with family adventures – on land, water and four wheels.

01 The clear waters of Lake McKenzie © Sean Scott/Tourism and Events Queensland 02 Having a swim at Champagne Pools © Mark Fitz/ Tourism and Events Queensland 03 Pipi hunting on the beach © Chris Stead 04 Sheltered from the wind at Central Station campground © Chris Stead 05 Going with the flow at Eli Creek © Rileys Travels/Tourism and Events Queensland



The drive up from Sydney has been long – it's taken days. The kids kick open the doors, letting in some fresh air and narrowly missing neighbouring vehicles, packed in like Lego across the ferry's deck. I'm relieved to see all the cargo is where I left it. My Prado's roof rack is piled high with 11 days' worth of food and camping gear.

I'm the last up the stairs to the ferry's viewing platform, muscles slowly unfurling from the long drive to Hervey Bay. Over the shoulders of my wife and three kids, our destination grows large on the horizon: K'gari (formerly Fraser Island), the biggest sand island on the planet and a UNESCO World Heritage-listed wilderness. Their eyes lock on the island and I see the excitement in their body language – pointing, shouting, giggling. This is going to be special.

Setting up camp

We base ourselves at Central Station for our entire stay, a sheltered spot tucked in the rainforest by Wanggoolba Creek, in the heart of K'gari. There are beach campgrounds along the coast with great views that are much closer to the water, but they're exposed to southerlies, speeding cars and rough surf. And dingoes.

> "Dodging stingrays in the flats of Kingfisher Bay, then catching dinner off the long jetty while the sun settles into a thousand shades of red"

At Central Station, the campground is fenced off from the native wildlife, allowing our kids to run around without the threat of a canine catastrophe. We're joined by lots of other families, providing plenty of opportunities for the kids to play hide and seek while the parents chat over wine and cheese. Campsites are flat, spaced out and large enough for trailers or family sized tents. Just don't expect many luxuries beyond a flushing toilet. Hot showers are hit and miss, there are no firepits and the dense canopy makes solar power unreliable.

Central Station is aptly named, and while getting to the various sights does require some lengthy drives (K'gari is 122 kilometres long), the campground is a good base. It's close to Lake McKenzie (Boorangoora), whose iconic aqua waters and stunning white sand are a wonderland for kids and parents alike. The route back to our campsite from most of our adventures passes the lake, allowing us to jump in, cool off and relax.

Adventures aplenty

Each day we plot a new adventure. We pack the solar kit and fridge into the 4WD alongside bodyboards, fishing rods and swimming gear, and take off. We spend most of our time on the east coast, home to long stretches of sand (including 75 Mile Beach) interspersed with rocky headlands and lots of pipi fossicking opportunities. From Central, the tiny village of Eurong is our gateway to the beach and a handy pitstop for supplies. Here, you'll find a petrol station, general store, mechanic, bakery and pub, as well as a rare patch of phone reception.

Every moment on K'gari is filled with memories of little feet carrying big smiles towards soft sands and fresh water – it's hard to pick a favourite. Hiking through the bush to Lake Wabby, bodyboards tucked under our arms, would be one. The thrill of sliding down the huge sandhills into the water, where catfish busy about our feet. Hanging out on the back of my 4WD at Eli Creek watching my kids doing laps as they race through the bush to the head of the stream, then float back down on a blow-up unicorn.

Pulling up to the SS *Maheno* wreck, run aground in a cyclone in 1935, and seeing my kids marvel at its rusted remains. Letting the waves knock you off the rocks into the Champagne Pools, then trying to see how many fish you can spot at the bottom before resurfacing. Counting the different sand colours at The Pinnacles. Watching a dingo as it stalks the beach. Spotting snakes and eels on the hike up to Basin Lake. Dodging stingrays in the flats of Kingfisher Bay, then catching dinner off the long jetty while the sun settles into a thousand shades of red.

As we wave goodbye to K'gari and begin the long journey home, I don't feel like I've simply ticked off a destination on my camping bucket list, because I'd happily go back again. To feel the sand beneath the tyres once more and taste the salt in the air. Day after day. ●

Do your homework

K'gari is a 50-minute ferry from Hervey Bay, about a 3.5 hour drive north of Brisbane. Book your campsite and permits online.

parks.desi.qld.gov.au *sealink.com.au*

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Did you know

Dingos are a legitimate concern on K'gari, especially on the outskirts of tourist hotspots. Read up on dingo safety; don't feed or interact with them, keep kids close, carry a stick, and store food and rubbish securely.

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4WD know-how

You'll spend almost your entire K'gari trip driving on sand, but not once did I feel at risk of getting bogged. Even at its heaviest, the sand is surprisingly manageable and some families even tow large caravans (not recommended on the inland routes). Take your vehicle tyre pressure down to 18psi and be prepared for tight, single-lane roads that can be very bumpy after rain. Drive safe, know the tides and beware – K'gari does have police. I saw speed radars and was even breathalysed.

Star power

Wow your family with an astro adventure on your next camping getaway at these top Australian stargazing spots, writes Laura Barry.

With vast landscapes untainted by light pollution, Australia is one of the best places in the world for stargazing. And you don't need a fancy telescope to enjoy the astro action. Sitting by a campfire as the cosmos lights up the night sky is one of the great joys of camping. Australia is home to four internationally recognised Dark Sky Places – a combination of parks, sanctuaries and reserves distinguished for their epic starry nights. Beyond the official sites are other hotspots where budding astronomers can view planets, astrological constellations, and even the mesmerising colours of the Aurora Australis (Southern Lights).

Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park NT

With low humidity, no light pollution and clear night skies, the Red Centre offers unparalleled stargazing of Magellanic Clouds, the Southern Cross and a brilliant Milky Way set against the monolithic Uluru. Join Outback Sky Journeys at Ayers Rock Resort for a cosmic tour filled with ancient Indigenous stories. Priced from $65 for adults; children 15 and under are free.
Camp it Ayers Rock Campground, 20 kilometres from Uluru, has 590 powered and unpowered campsites and 14 self-contained two-bedroom cabins. Amenities include a swimming pool, barbecue facilities, outdoor kitchen and a complimentary shuttle to the resort restaurants and shops.
ayersrockresort.com.au

River Murray International Dark Sky Reserve SA

Australia's longest river meets the vastness of the Milky Way at the River Murray International Dark Sky Reserve. The reserve, 100 kilometres east of Adelaide, earned its International Dark Sky designation in 2019 and encompasses 80 kilometres of river frontage. You'll find the prime stargazing spots at Swan Reach Conservation Park in the middle of the reserve, accessible by 4WD. Alternatively, join Big Bend By Night's Dark Sky Night Tour, a one-hour, open-top cart ride beneath the stars, from $20 per person. bigbend.com.au
rivermurraydarkskyreserve.org
Camp it Free self-contained bush camping is permitted in the park. Alternatively, Meldanda has unpowered sites with basic facilities and a dedicated night viewing paddock for stargazing.
meldanda.com.au

Karijini National Park WA

Located in WA's remote Pilbara, Karijini National Park is celebrated for its ancient red-rock gorges, tranquil swimming holes, cascading waterfalls, flowering wattle displays and, with its minimal light pollution, stargazing beneath clear desert skies. Stay at Karijini Eco Retreat and join the astronomer-guided 1.5-hour Night Sky Tour and view the Omega Centauri globular cluster, 16,000 light years away through a telescope. This is one of Australia's most remote stargazing experiences and is not to be missed.
Camp it Karijini Eco Retreat has 64 unpowered sites, or upgrade to an Eco Cabin or Luxury Eco Tent with private bathroom. There's also a kiosk, restaurant and bar on site, plus a camp kitchen, flush toilets and solar-powered showers. *karijiniecoretreat.com.au*

Warrumbungle Dark Sky Park NSW

Declared Australia's first official Dark Sky Park in 2016, Warrumbungle National Park is a half-hour drive west of Coonabarabran. By day, explore the wildlife and dramatic rock formations on the Breadknife and Grand High Tops Walk (best for older kids). At night, look to the heavens and see why the park's clear skies, low humidity and high altitude make it one of Australia's premier stargazing spots. Don't miss a visit to the Siding Spring Observatory on the edge of the park to learn about the station's search for 'dark energy' and life beyond Earth. *sidingspringobservatory.com.au*
Camp it Camp Blackman is within the Dark Sky Park boundary and has 109 powered and unpowered sites, barbecues, picnic tables, hot showers and resident kangaroos. Bring your own water but leave pets at home. *nationalparks.nsw.gov.au*

The Jump-Up Dark-Sky Sanctuary QLD

In remote outback Queensland, where prehistoric beasts once roamed, you'll find The Jump-Up Dark-Sky Sanctuary. One of only 10 sanctuaries of its kind in the world, the site is part of a remote mesa (tabletop range), riddled with dinosaur fossils. Your experience begins at the Australian Age of Dinosaurs Museum, where you can view fossils and dinosaur bones, and climaxes in stargazing beneath one of Australia's most remote and darkest skies. Join a guided tour at the Gondwana Stars Observatory or enjoy the cosmos from the Star Gallery, a free dedicated viewing area. *australianageofdinosaurs.com*
Camp it Winton Roadhouse is a 25-minute drive from the museum and has campsites and family cabins, a restaurant, pool, modern bathrooms, camp kitchens and barbecue facilities. *wintonroadhouse.com.au*

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Arkaroola International Dark Sky Sanctuary SA

Located in the geologically wondrous Flinders Ranges, Arkaroola is a dark-sky gem within a privately owned wilderness sanctuary. The property boasts some of the best 'seeing conditions' in the Southern Hemisphere, and you can bring your tent or caravan and camp on site. Choose from an astronomy tour in the observatories or opt for a robotic stargazing chair with astronomy binoculars. During the day, keep your eyes peeled for yellow-footed rock wallabies on the cliffs.
Camp it Arkaroola has a suite of accommodation options, including powered and unpowered sites, a bunkhouse and twin cabins. Facilities include a laundry, showers, toilets and camp kitchen. Bookings are not required but bring enough water to last your stay. *arkaroola.com.au*

Cradle Mountain-Lake St Clair National Park TAS

From Dove Lake and its photogenic boathouse, to snow-capped peaks and rainforests teeming with friendly wombats, this Tasmanian Wilderness

> "The alpine region is a hit for stargazers, offering the chance to glimpse the Southern Lights reflected upon Dove Lake"

01 Stargazing at Uluru © Voyages Ayers Rock Resort 02 Karijini sky show © Nick Rains/Tourism Western Australia 03 Aurora Australis over Cradle Mountain and Dove Lake © Tourism Tasmania 04 Arkaroola Star Chair 05 Stardust and dinos at the Jump-Up Dark-Sky Sanctuary

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World Heritage Area is renowned for its breathtaking hiking trails. But the alpine region is also a hit with stargazers, offering the chance to glimpse the Southern Lights reflected upon Dove Lake. Don't miss Devils @ Cradle, a conservation facility for Tasmania's carnivorous marsupials, just a 20-minute walk from the Cradle Mountain Visitor Centre. *parks.tas.gov.au devilsatcradle.com*

Camp it Discovery Parks – Cradle Mountain is on the edge of the national park and offers powered and unpowered sites and brand-new cabins, as well as barbecue, kitchen and laundry facilities, plus a kiosk. *discoveryholidayparks.com.au*

Gariwerd/Grampians National Park VIC

Gariwerd is a hiker's paradise of sandstone mountain ranges, majestic waterfalls, spring wildflower displays, Indigenous rock art and abundant wildlife. Three hours west of Melbourne, the World Heritage-listed national park is also popular for kayaking, fishing, mountain biking, rock climbing and 4WDing. When the sun slips beyond the western plains, return to the peaks at night for stunning Milky Way views. Hollow Mountain and Reeds lookouts offer the least light pollution, but Boroka Lookout – closer to the tourist hub of Halls Gap – is good too. *visitgrampians.com.au*

Camp it There are various holiday parks located in Halls Gap, including the excellent Halls Gap Lakeside Tourist Park. Smiths Mill Campground, near MacKenzie Falls, is a short drive from key lookouts, and has 28 tent sites and five caravan sites, all unpowered. Facilities include drop toilets, bush showers and fire pits. Bring your own firewood and water. *parks.vic.gov.au hallsgaplakeside.com*

Charleville Cosmos Centre and Observatory QLD

In outback Queensland, more than 700 kilometres from Brisbane, lies Charleville, a rural town known for its WWII Secret Base, the Charleville Bilby Experience and the Charleville Cosmos Centre and observatory. This facility is home to the state's largest planetarium, a specialty sun viewing room, and the renowned Big Sky Observatory. *cosmoscentre.com*

Camp it Evening Star Tourist Park is 12 kilometres from the observatory and has powered and unpowered sites and offers small-group stargazing sessions. *eveningstar.com.au* ●

Walk on the wild side

A little preparation (and lots of snacks) helps little legs tackle epic coastlines on Tasmania's Three Capes Track, writes Lindy Alexander.

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Knee-deep in icy water, trousers rolled up, and hiking boots draped around her neck, my daughter squeals as waves crash into her legs. I start wondering if my partner and I have made a mistake bringing our kids on this adventure. Others in our group are already sitting on the sun-warmed rocks, drying their feet and putting on their boots. We're still 20 metres from the shore and, as we move through the frigid water, my daughter turns to me. I brace for a torrent of complaints. "I love this!" she says, grinning.

We're half an hour into our four-day, three-night hike along Tasmania's Three Capes Track, and so far, so good. We've waded ashore to the Denman's Cove trailhead after plopping off the back of a small boat. From here, we'll tackle the 48-kilometre walk to Fortescue Bay, hugging the Tasman Peninsula. It's the first multi-night hike for our family of four – me, my partner, our nine-year-old daughter and 12-year-old son – and as soon as we start the walk on Paredarerme Country, we know we've made the right choice.

The perfect introduction

While we're an outdoorsy family, up until now our walks have mostly been one-day affairs where a restaurant meal and comfy bed have waited at the end of any strenuous hike in nature. We chose the Three Capes because it ticked all the boxes – a beautiful hut-to-hut walk in Tasmania's far south-east, welcome accommodation at the end of each day (no need to carry a tent), communal kitchens (no need to carry a stove) and daily walking distances ranging from four to 19 kilometres (no need to carry tired kids).

The easy-to-moderate hike has been perfectly crafted so all you have to do is put one foot in front of the other and enjoy the views. Timber boardwalks, gravel trails and stone steps follow the natural contours of the sea cliffs, secluded bays and forests – making

01 Cape Hauy, near the end of the Three Capes Track © Tourism Tasmania
02 Cabins provide comfort after a day's hiking © Lindy Alexander 03 Tasman Island framing the Three Capes Track © Tourism Tasmania

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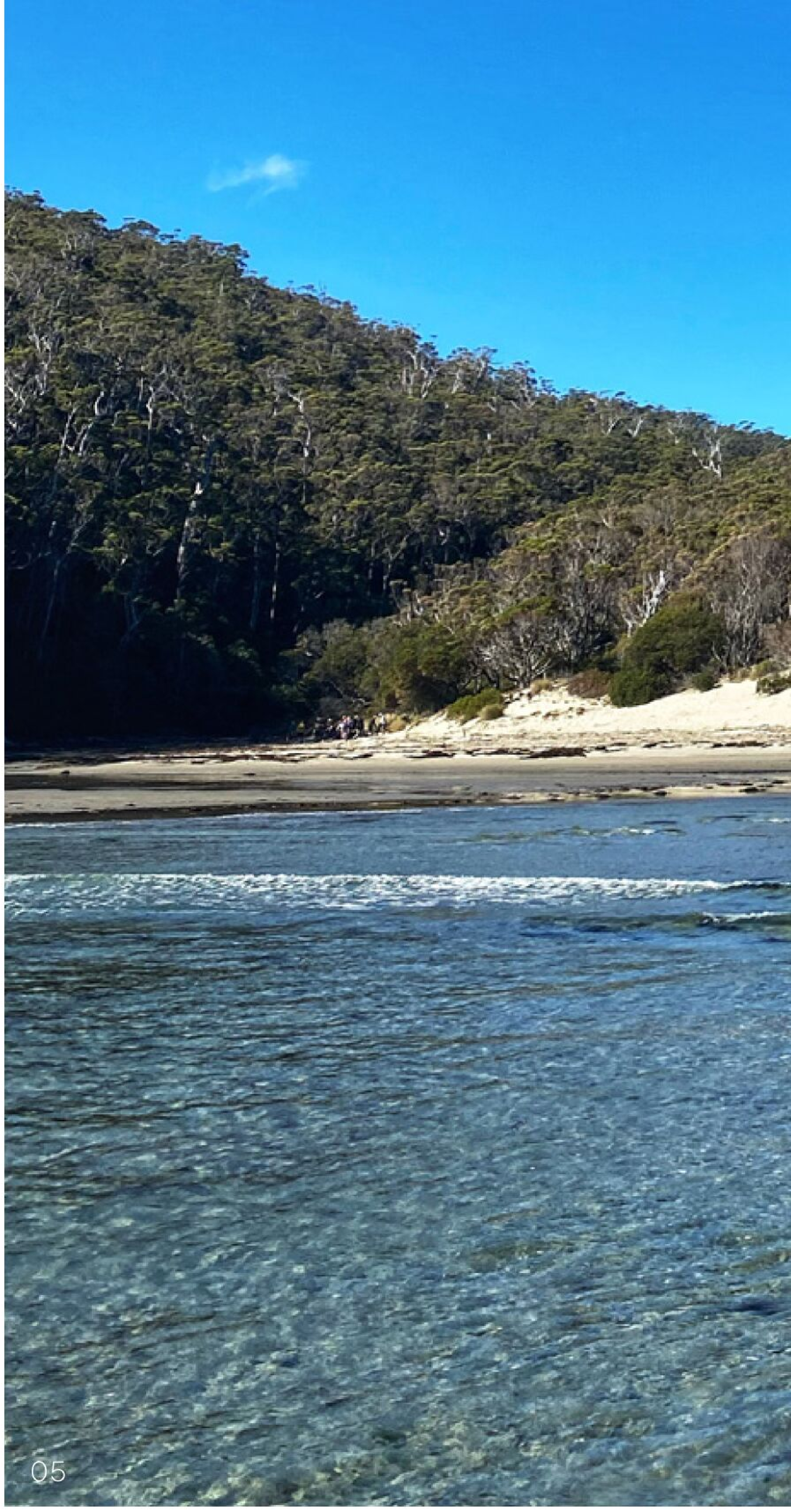
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04 Stretching muscles at the end of the day © Peter Reynolds 05 A wet introduction to the trail © Peter Reynolds 06 Defying the weather on the trail © Peter Reynolds 07 Critters you meet on the way © Tourism Tasmania

navigation a cinch. Strategically placed 'story seats' are highlights, with 40 installations sprinkled throughout, each corresponding to a story in the provided guidebook. The kids love charting their progress by looking at the map and racing ahead to the next story seat.

Pre-allocated bunk beds mean we can take our time each day, knowing cabin six at every location is ours. My sister, her husband and their 10-year-old daughter join us for the hike, and this undoubtedly makes the walk more enjoyable for us all.

Keeping 'em motivated

While constant drizzle on the second day dampens our spirits, the kids are excited to try out their waterproof coats and trousers. Before we left for the hike, we reflected on what motivated our kids. In the case of my daughter, it's equipment, so having her own backpack, hydration bladder and hiking poles means she feels like a grown up. Whereas my son frets about leaving his favourite books at home, so we allow one book, as long as he carries it. The kids all have notebooks and small pencil cases, and each

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Do your homework

Check trail and weather conditions, carry first aid supplies, share travel plans with someone at home, and pick distances that are achievable for your youngest member. If hiking in a national park, check out the relevant authorities' websites. AllTrails has excellent maps and suggestions for hiking with kids.
threecapestrack.com.au
alltrails.com

Green card

- *rainwater harvesting*
- *compost bins*
- *carry-out rubbish*

07

> "The spectacular views, ever-changing terrain and excellent amenities all contribute to a wonderful experience... My kids have now caught the hiking bug"

afternoon on the large communal decks they stretch out together, drawing and chatting (and doing ad-hoc yoga sessions on the mats provided at our cabin).

While my brother-in-law prioritised bringing a small flask of whisky (and my sister regrets her decision not to pack a pouch of wine), the kids rejoice in refilling their daily snack bags with nuts, dried fruit, chocolate buttons and, of course, lollies.

Surprisingly we don't have many moments when the kids complain, and even then, their gripes (usually about tired legs or running out of snacks) are short-lived. The spectacular views, ever-changing terrain, company of their cousin and excellent amenities (including a welcome open-air bucket shower with steaming hot water at the second hut) all contribute to a wonderful experience.

My kids have now caught the hiking bug. The day after returning home, I find my daughter reading a hiking guidebook. She tells me she is writing a list of all the walks she wants to do. And at the top of the list? To do the Three Capes Track again.

Preparation is key

It's best to start small, with easy distances and single nights before building up to multi-day adventures. Share the load with your kids and ask what they want to carry in their backpack (don't be surprised if snacks are first on the list). Comfort is often in short supply on overnight expeditions, but moods can be lifted by small touches – think sachets of hot chocolate, lightweight camping pillows and slides to change into after a long day walking. ●

Campfire tales

For travel inspiration and a good page-turner once you're there, look no further than this bundle of books for campers big, small and furry.

Mark Cunich
STORY SPARKS
IGNITE YOUR BEDTIME STORYTELLING!

Story Sparks

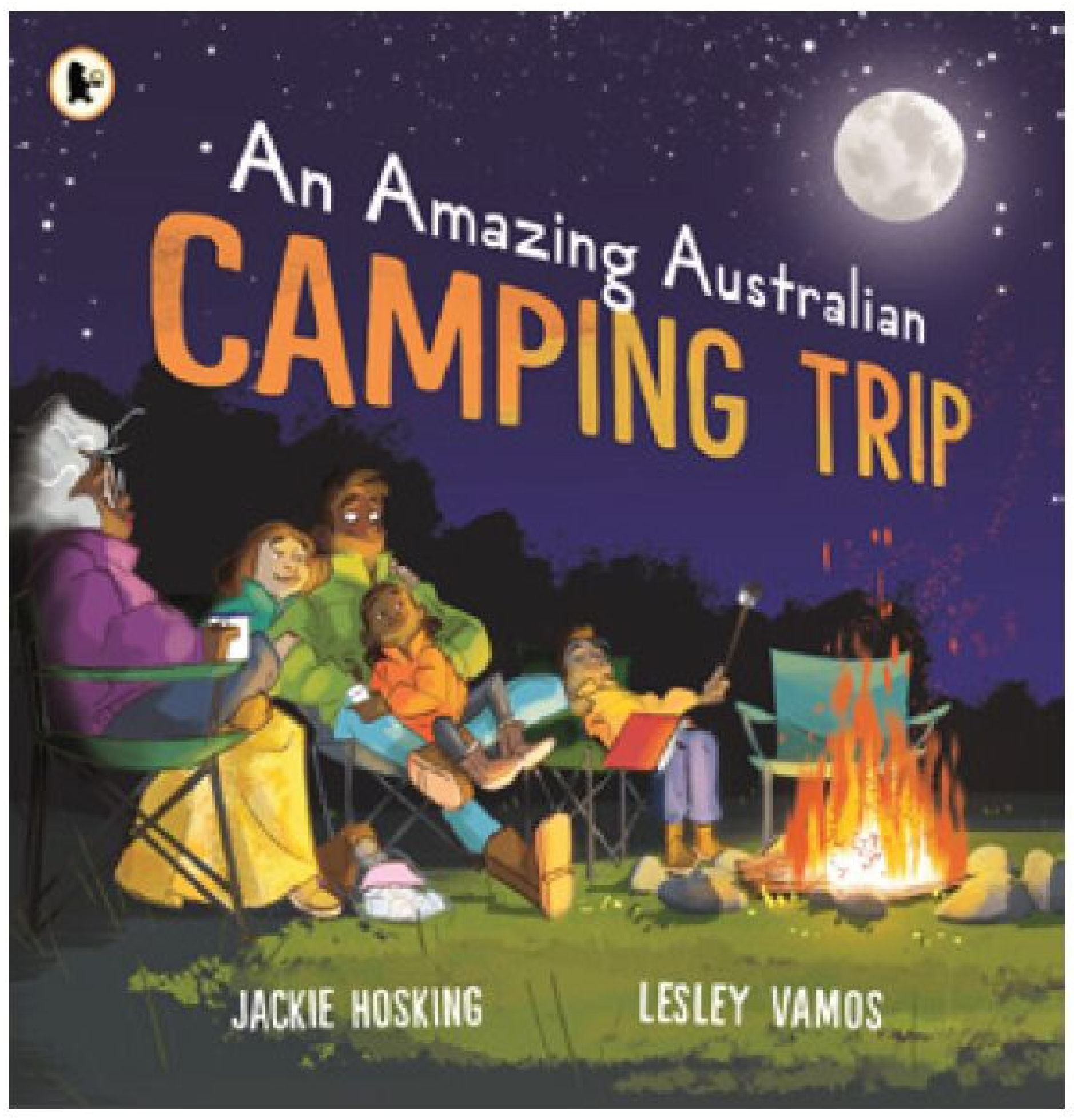
By Mark Cunich

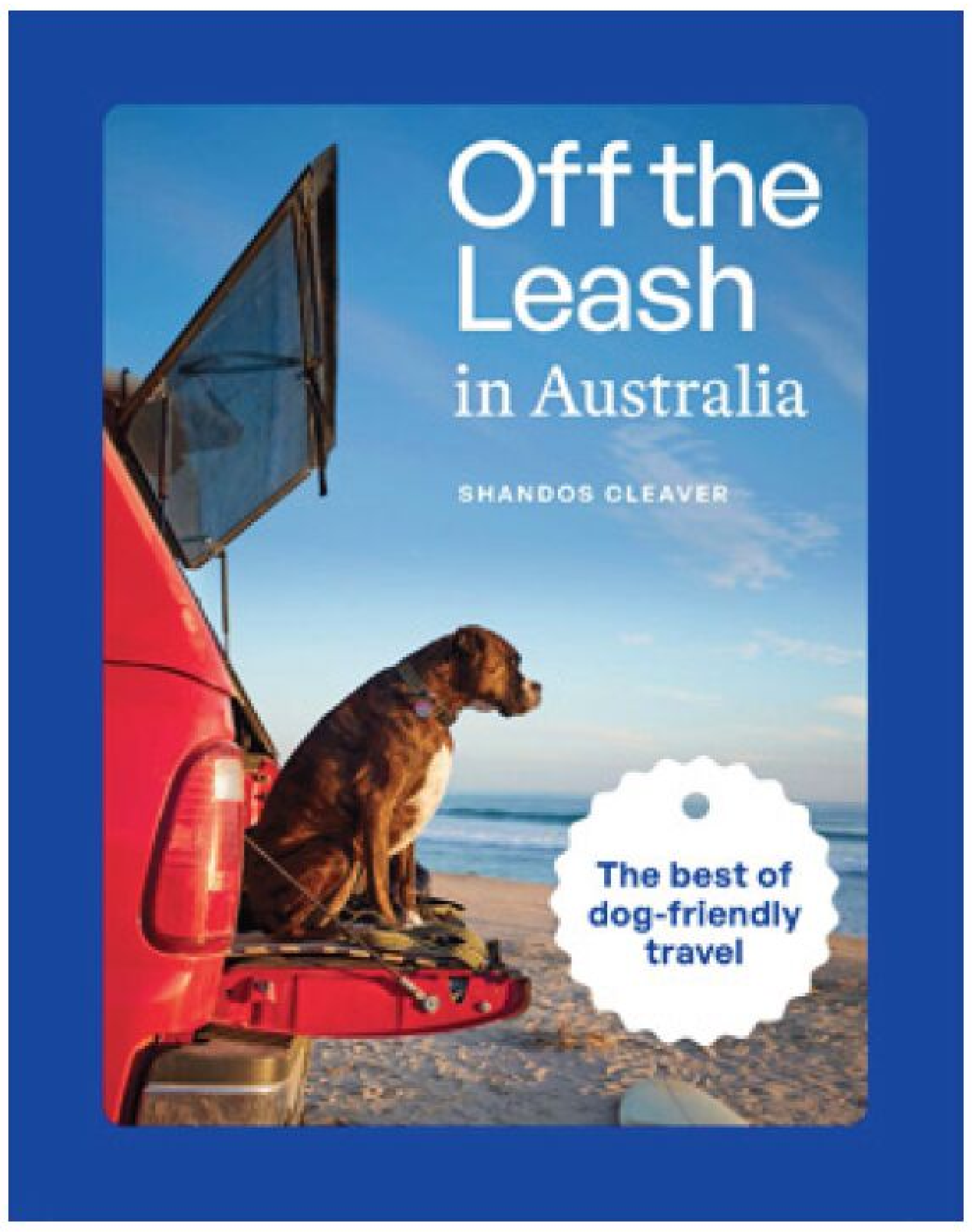
Get creative with your bedtime routine with *Story Sparks*, a choose-your-own-adventure book with more than 1,000 plot combinations. Each page has three flippable panel prompts – character, location and situation – so kids can create their own unique stories. Soar into space, talk to a fire truck or suss out smelly odours. With hundreds of stories in one, *Story Sparks* is a big space saver on the road. *Published by Wilkinson Publishing, RRP $39.95*

An Amazing Australian Camping Trip

By Jackie Hosking

The much-loved family from *An Amazing Australian Road Trip* is back on another adventure-filled camping trip. Their quest? To find an elusive Australian creature for Aunty to paint. But tracking down the right one proves quite the challenge. Follow the hilarious Aussie family as they encounter various native Australian animals on a journey from bush to burrow, campsite to creek. *Published by Walker Books, RRP $24.99*

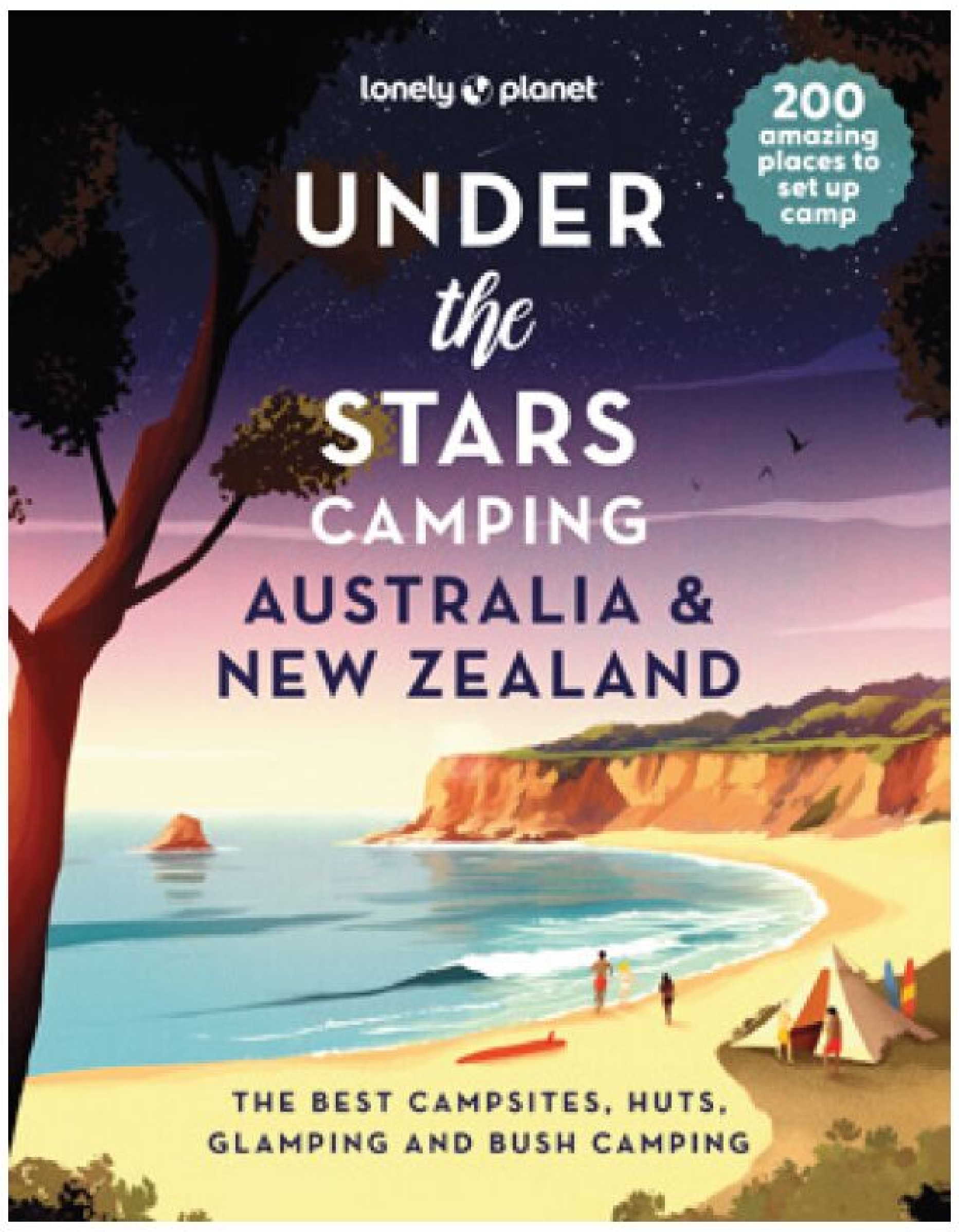

An Amazing Australian
CAMPING TRIP
JACKIE HOSKING
LESLEY VAMOS


Off the Leash
in Australia
SHANDOS CLEAVER
The best of dog-friendly travel

Off the Leash in Australia

By Shandos Cleaver

Whether you're caravanning across the Nullarbor or bush camping, holidays are more special with your pooch in tow. But travelling with pets isn't always easy. Take the stress out of travelling with your furry friend and discover top dog-friendly destinations with *Off the Leash in Australia*. Packed with expert advice, the guidebook features top tips from blogger Shandos Cleaver, who has travelled across Australia with her miniature dachshund, Schnitzel. *Published by Hardie Grant, RRP $37.99*


lonely planet
200 amazing places to set up camp
UNDER the STARS
CAMPING
AUSTRALIA & NEW ZEALAND
THE BEST CAMPSITES, HUTS, GLAMPING AND BUSH CAMPING

Lonely Planet Under the Stars Camping Australia & New Zealand

By Sarah Reid, Tasmin Waby and Andrew Bain

Fancy sleeping in a pre-erected tent on a remote island in the Torres Strait? How about pitching your own where the reef meets the rainforest in Cape Tribulation, or bedding down in a rustic wagon on New Zealand's Banks Peninsula? All this and more is possible with inspiration found in Lonely Planet's latest outdoor travel book, *Under the Stars Camping Australia & New Zealand*. The book spotlights 200 of the best campsites, huts, glamping and bush camping spots across Australia and New Zealand, from clifftop glamping on Christmas Island and a Kombi camp in Tasmania, to a converted train carriage on New Zealand's South Island and a North Island waterfall campsite straight out of a scene from *Lord of the Rings*. The book also contains family friendly stays and a round-up of cycling, hiking, paddling and surfing adventures. *Published by Lonely Planet, RRP $44.99*

Camp code

Litter, long showers, loud music late into the night – there are plenty of ways to make enemies on the road. Follow these tips for good campsite etiquette, and everyone will be happy campers.

Do...

- **Keep it clean** Trust us: leaving the camp kitchen full of grubby dishes will ruffle some feathers. So will a messy barbecue grill or hair in the shower. Leaving camp amenities how you'd like to find them is the golden rule of camping.
- **Keep it down** Some campsite sounds are welcome – morning birdsong and grinding coffee beans, for example. Other sounds, not so much, especially in the wee hours. Blaring rock music, screaming competitions and revving engines: we're looking at you.
- **Leave no trace** Wherever you camp, respect the environment and local regulations. Dispose of waste – be it pet, human or household – responsibly. Don't leave rubbish behind, recycle where possible and avoid single-use plastics. Don't plunder the bush for firewood and use existing firepits if you can.
- **Be grey-water smart** Don't drain wastewater into someone else's campsite (yuck!) or near a river or creek (detergents can be harmful). If your caravan has a greywater tank, carry your wastewater out. If there are drainage facilities on-site, use them.
- **Respect the wildlife** This means no feeding, harassing or touching. And store your food correctly to avoid attracting unwanted critters.

Don't...

- **Hog the amenities** There are only so many washing machines, showers and dishwashing sinks to go around. Clear out your washing as soon as it's done, and keep showers short so others can enjoy a hot shower too.
- **Van-spread** Sprawling across multiple campsites, even when they are undefined, is a big no-no. And if you plan to fire up a noisy generator, park away from others – not beside tent campers who would prefer to sleep in peace.
- **Neglect your campfire** Smoking out your neighbours isn't cool, nor is starting a bushfire. Make sure campfires are permitted, keep them small, don't leave them unattended, and always supervise kids around fire.
- **Let pets roam free** Not everyone loves your pooch as much as you do, especially when they're jumping up on scared toddlers or sniffing out a family barbecue. Make sure your furry friends are allowed and keep them on a leash.
- **Be rude** Taking a shortcut through someone else's campsite is poor form. Likewise, gawking at your neighbours having a domestic while they're trying to back into their site isn't polite. Everyone's doing their best – spare the judgement. ●

Some like it hot

Elevate your camp cooking with inspiration from open-fire chef Sarah Glover, who believes in making family memories through food, writes Laura Barry.

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01 Sarah Glover draws cooking inspiration from nature 02 Banana split smile of approval 03 Watch the wind when cooking outdoors 04 You can never have too much chocolate 05 Outdoor cooking is possible in urban settings 06 Sometimes cooking outdoors is theatrical 07-11 Banana split is a delicious treat the kids can help prepare. All images © Katrina Parker

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Being in nature is what makes Sarah Glover's heart sing. Growing up in Tasmania with seven siblings, the adventurous chef and cookbook author spent her days surfing, fishing and exploring the great outdoors. Today, the natural environment continues to inspire what Glover puts on her plate. "As kids, my dad would take us lobster diving on the east coast of Tasmania, and afterwards we would sit around the table overlooking the water and eat like kings – but we were in a simple setting," Sarah says. "Nature is free and anyone can access it. When families prepare a meal together outside, it connects people – they tend to put their phone down and remember it more than dining in a cafe."

Glover started her culinary journey at just 16, studying commercial cookery and working her way up from washing dishes to head chef in a career that took her from the restaurants of Hobart to Sydney. Upon returning to Tasmania, she discovered a love for wild – sometimes theatrical – open-fire cooking, which sparked a catering business, a series of cookbooks and a YouTube channel.

"I started a catering business for weddings on rural properties called The Wild Kitchen in 2017 and then moved to the USA to expand it in 2021," she says. "I wanted to explore the States and write a new cookbook, and I discovered my strong suit was creativity – creating moments for people to be inspired by childlike approaches to food and dining."

Sarah's culinary concept draws upon her technical knowledge of cookery and adapts it to a raw, outdoor setting, incorporating elements of the landscape, weather and season to authentically represent a place through flavour. "I guess I'm a storyteller. I lean on what the land tells me about its story and use this as a backdrop for all I do; the mood of the food… and the wood I cook on," she explains. "I love thinking like a child, how they would approach the space and the setting with a playful attitude."

It's a unique approach that culminated in Sarah appearing on *Gordon Ramsay: Unchartered* in 2021. Despite her success, her ethos remains unchanged: cooking is about encouraging people to get outside and spend time together.

"My brothers and I used to camp on Bruny Island so we could get up early and surf. But for me, it was about the adventure of it and the sausages cooked in a crappy old frying pan or on a stick," Sarah recalls. She has this advice for camping families: "Keep it simple and find a spot to sit and create a memory; don't be afraid to get out of your comfort zone. All you need is a good knife, salt, a Dutch oven and good extra virgin olive oil."

WILD CHILD
ADVENTURE COOKING WITH KIDS
BY SARAH GLOVER
PRESTEL

Sarah Glover's children's cookbook, *Wild Child: Adventure Cooking with Kids*, is published by Prestel Publishing and available on her website, RRP $45. *sarahglover.com.au*.

For more cooking inspiration, follow Sarah on Instagram. @misssarahglover

Banana Split

Serves 4

Quick and fun, this is probably one of the easiest campfire desserts you will ever make. Kids love seeing the bananas cook and caramelise in front of their eyes. You're placing the bananas straight onto the fire, so make sure the adults help with cooking.

Ingredients

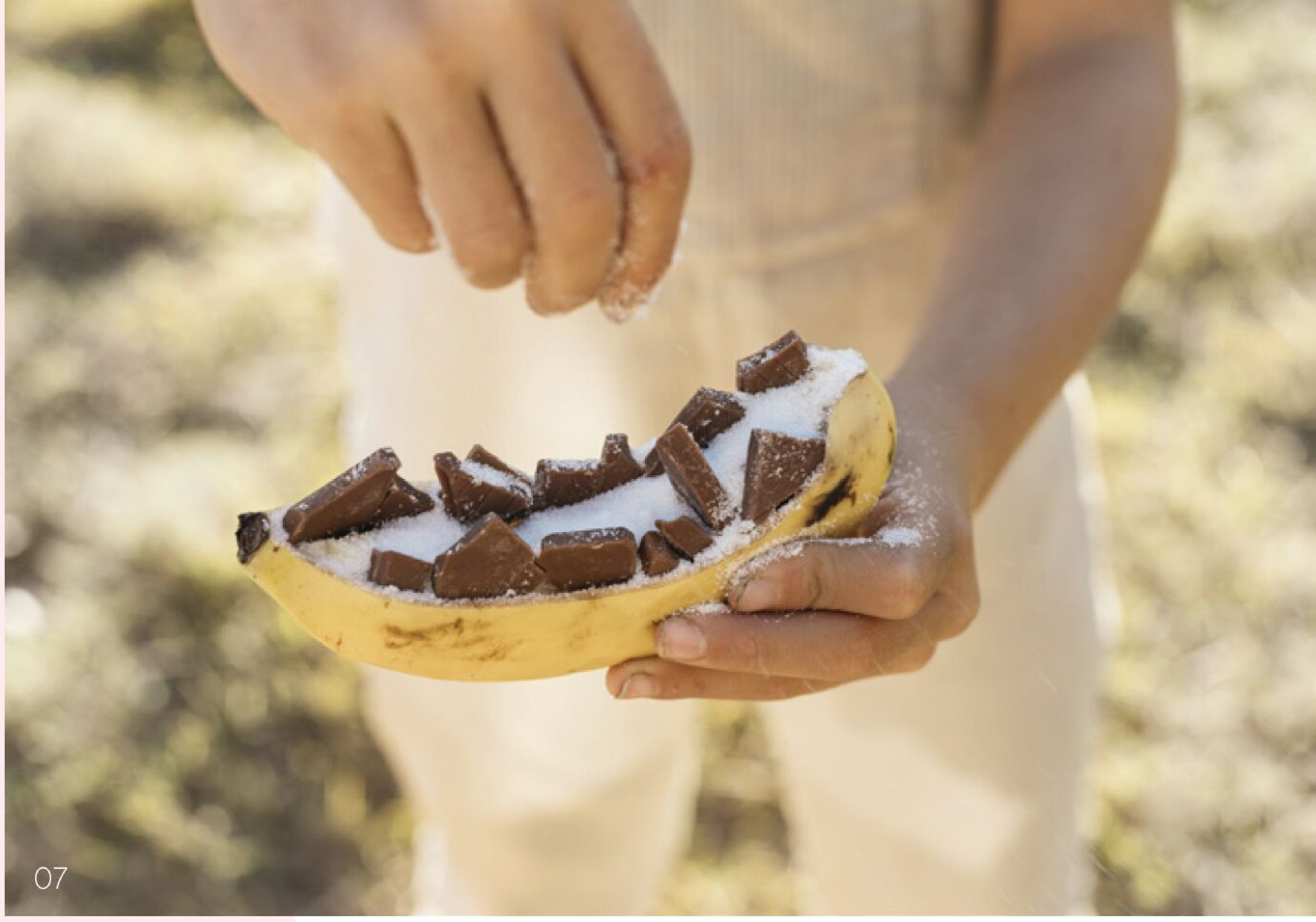
Bananas

- 4 bananas
- 1 cup (150g) large chocolate melts
- ⅓ cup (75g) caster sugar

Cream Dream

(Makes about one cup/240ml)

- ½ cup (120ml) heavy cream
- ½ cup (120g) mascarpone
- 1 tablespoon raw sugar, such as Demerara
- 1 teaspoon vanilla bean paste



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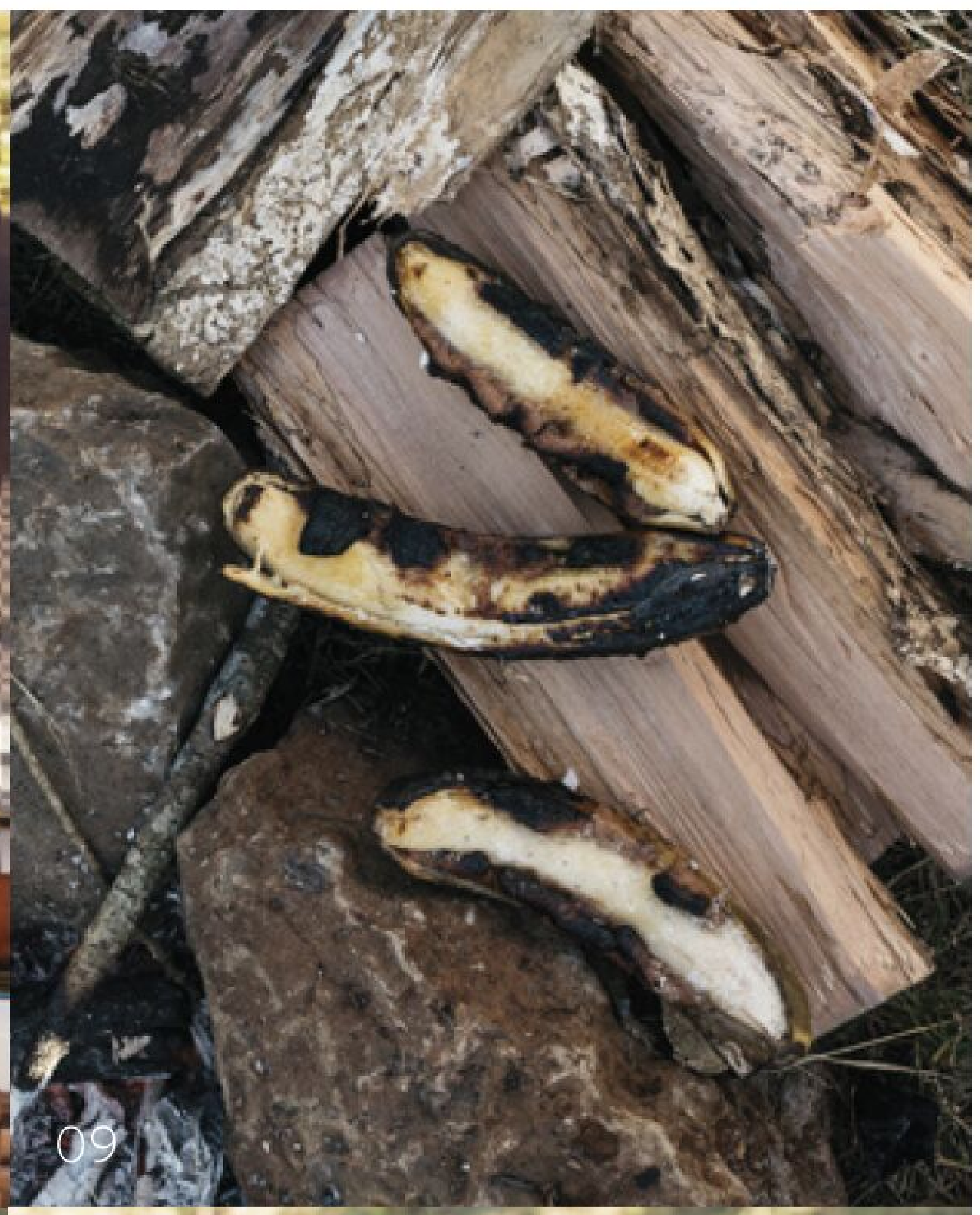

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Method

Cream Dream

1. Combine all ingredients in a medium bowl and whisk until cream starts to thicken slightly.
2. Cover and refrigerate for at least 30 minutes to allow the sugar to dissolve. (Cream Dream can be refrigerated in an airtight container for up to two weeks.)

Bananas

1. Light your fire and let it burn down for about an hour, or until you have a hot heat (you need a hot fire to caramelise the sugar).
2. Tear off a strip of skin on each banana to expose some of the flesh.
3. Gently press chocolate melts around the side of each banana so they stick inside the skin, allowing the chocolate to melt without burning in the fire.
4. Coat the exposed strip of banana flesh with caster sugar; it will melt in the heat of the fire and turn to toffee, so you'll want to use a generous amount.
5. Using a pair of long tongs, arrange the bananas under a burning log or very hot coals, which act as a blowtorch on the sugar.
6. Leave to cook in the fire for two to five minutes, or until the sugar has melted into toffee. Remove the caramelised bananas with the tongs and let cool briefly.
7. While the bananas are cooling, whisk the Cream Dream to incorporate all the melted sugar. It should be a very light brown colour.
8. Once the bananas have cooled, serve them with Cream Dream. ●

Instant-up tent

Reviewed by Lisa Wagstaff

Many years ago, a friend bought an instant-up tent. He unzipped the bag and whoosh, it was up. We all thought it was the bee's knees until it was time to get it back in the bag. We twisted it this way and that, limbs contorting into pretzel shapes attempting to get it down, which my friend eventually did, well after everyone else had packed up. Fast forward a few years and I surprised myself by purchasing a Coleman Instant Up Darkroom 4 Person Tent.

The new technology has a sturdy frame that pulls out and up in a matter of seconds. Peg it down, pull over the fly (made with Superior RipStop material), tension the guy ropes, and you're done. Set-up is complete in two minutes, pack-down too, and the generous bag compensates for any shoddy folding. The dome tent has a 2.4m x 2.4m floor, a 1.9m height, and darkroom technology that filters out 95 per cent of light. Near pitch black at any time of the day, it reduces heat by up to 5°C. While great for a sleep-in, the darkroom made seeing inside the tent a little difficult during the day.

Specifications

Coleman Instant Up Darkroom 4 Person Tent
Cost RRP $599.99
colemanaustralia.com.au

Compact cook set

Reviewed by Eleanor Edstrom

If there's one challenge every adventure-loving crew faces, it's hungry bellies – and bulky camp cookware just doesn't cut it on the road. Gerber Gear's new ComplEAT Cook Set strikes the right balance between durable functionality and compact convenience. The 16-piece kit has everything you need to create a delicious family meal, including a generous stock pot, sauté pan, chef's knife and cutting board set, mixing bowl, hot pad, tableware for four and storage bag.

I love that this space-saving set stacks all your cooking essentials together into a neat, portable package. Made from durable stainless steel, the pot and pan can be used on induction stovetops and open flame and are built to last. Each features a detachable lock-in handle and three-ply base for even heat distribution, while the nonstick technology makes washing up a breeze. But my favourite feature is how the plates stack onto the mixing bowl, functioning as a leftovers or meal-prep container. Multi-purpose is key when camping. To win a set, *see page 69*.

Specifications

Gerber Gear ComplEAT Cook Set
Cost RRP $329
gerbergear.com.au, anacondastores.com

Porta Potti

Luxe portable loo

Reviewed by Catherine Best

When the call of nature happens in, ahem, nature, you need a compact, reliable and odour-free toilet that meets the needs of the whole family. The Thetford Porta Potti range is up to the task, providing a lightweight, portable solution for families who love the outdoors and don't let a lack of facilities spoil their off-grid adventures.

A world leader in mobile sanitation, Thetford has a range of Porta Potties to accommodate every size family and camping space, ranging from a 10-litre manual piston-pump flush to a 21-litre electric flushing unit. The Porta Potties come with optional accessories, including a discreet and convenient carry bag and a Hold Down Kit and Floor Plate for easy installation in caravans and campers. Complementing the range is a series of bathroom care products, including toilet bowl cleaner, rinse spray and Aqua Kem Blue Sachets, for odour-free waste management.

Thetford has been our go-to toilet brand for several years. We have a cassette toilet in our caravan and a Porta Potti for rugged off-road adventures in the tent. Easy to use, empty, clean and maintain, the Thetford has never let us down. And it sure beats digging a hole in the bush, a practice that is not permitted everywhere. As the inventor of the original portable toilet, Thetford has your family's tooshies covered.

Specifications

Thetford Porta Potti
Cost from RRP $159
thetford.com.au

Genius drink organiser

Reviewed by Eleanor Edstrom

Say goodbye to punctured cans and on-the-go spillages with this nifty can organiser that keeps drinks secure on the road. Whether you're camping, boating or road-tripping, CAN BUDDY is a trusty travel companion no matter your poison – beer, cider, pre-mixes or soft drink. The neat storage solution is designed to keep cans safe and dent-free and helps prevent any liquid explosions when they're opened. Each holder snuggly grips six cans and is stackable, so you can maximise Esky and car space without worrying about your favourite thirst quenchers toppling over. No more crying over spilt lemonade!

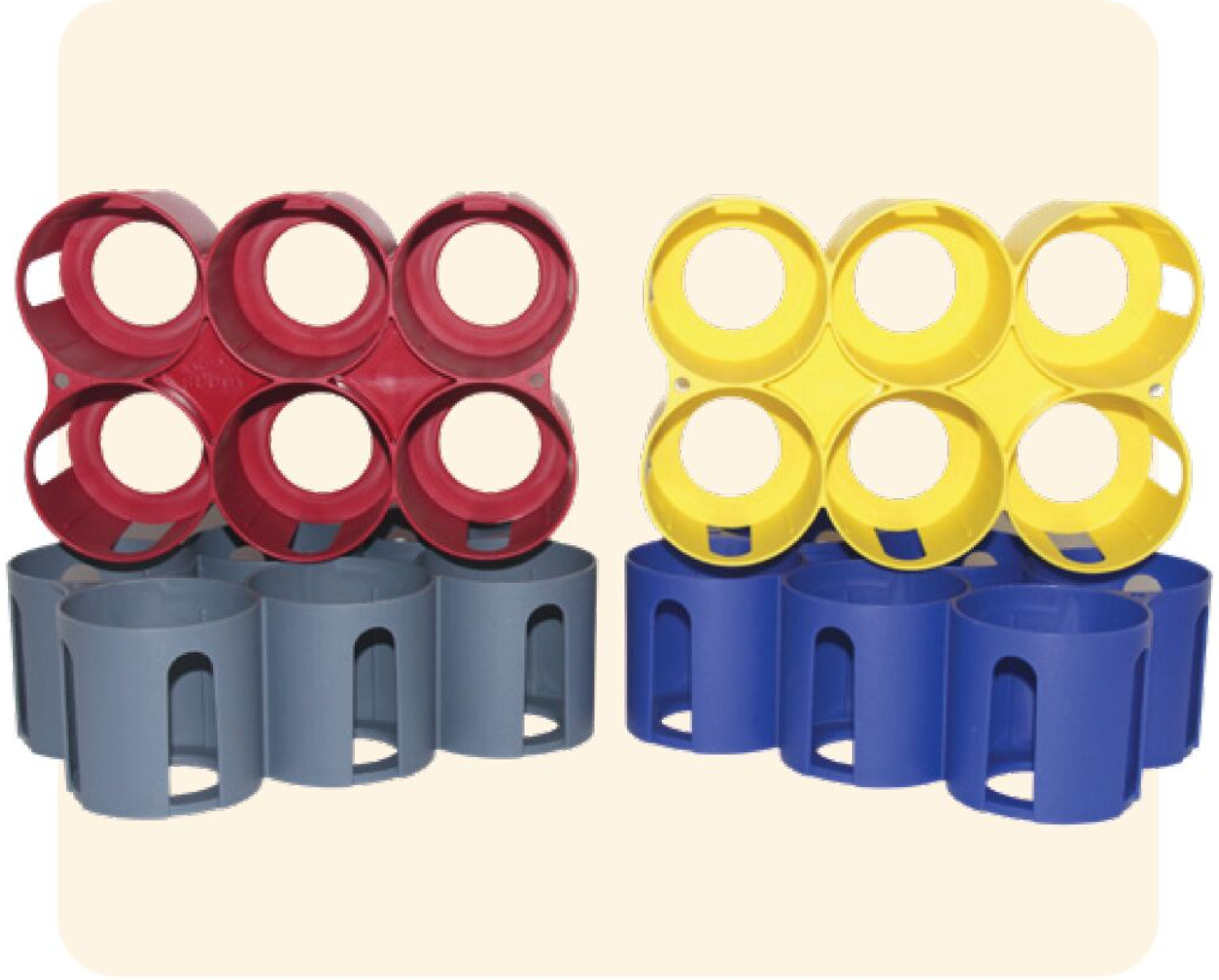
Australian designed and made, CAN BUDDY was dreamt up by Andy McGraa who had a light bulb moment during a long road trip to Darwin. Frustrated with one too many rollaway cans, he brainstormed a solution, 3D printing a storage prototype and, voila, CAN BUDDY was born.

The clever little invention is made from sturdy, 100 per cent recyclable polypropylene that can withstand the bumpiest of Aussie roads. It comes in a range of fun colours – yellow, red, blue and grey – and fits in almost every portable fridge, including Engel, Bushman and Evakool brands.

At first, we were a little concerned the plastic casing might prevent cans from staying cold, but those fears were unfounded – drinks stay nice and chilled. Win, win.

Specifications

Can Buddy
Cost RRP $25
canbuddy.com.au



Sunscreen on the go

Reviewed by Eleanor Edstrom

Space is at a premium when travelling, and lotions and potions take up valuable room. But what if you could decant your sunscreen, moisturiser and after-sun lotion into a reusable, on-the-go dispenser? Australian-made Solmates has you covered with their user-friendly roll-on eco applicators. Coming in compact 50ml and 100ml bottles, Solmates are made from recycled Ocean Bound Plastic and can be refilled again and again, reducing the need for travel-sized, single-use plastic bottles.

I recently took this clever little fella out on a bushwalk and loved how easy it was to use. Simply unscrew the base, fill the applicator with your favourite sunscreen and roll it on. The leak-proof design evenly applies the perfect amount of sunscreen with barely any rubbing required, and is so easy for kids! The handy tether latches onto bags for easy access, and the bright, summery colours look fab. You might want to store it upside down if you're using mineral or zinc sunscreens or lotions with a thicker consistency. My verdict? It's sustainable, stylish and practical. Big tick.

Specifications

Solmates
Cost RRP $29.95
solmates.com.au

Hair band hero

Reviewed by Catherine Best

I'm a mum to two long-haired daughters. It's not unusual for me to have three hair bands around my wrists at any one time. Some disappear, others ring-bark my skin, all look a bit, well, shabby. Not anymore. Introducing Gypsea Loop, a stylish and discreet bangle that gets your hair band off your wrist and turns it into a fashion statement. Developed by caravanning blogger and YouTuber Tracy Morris of the Blonde Nomads, the oval bangle has a snug channel for your hair band, with a clever finger groove for easy release. Choose from silver (polished stainless steel) or gold (18K gold-plated) and mix and match hair band colours to suit your outfit. The bangles are PVD-coated for durability and comfort and are hypoallergenic, waterproof, sweat-proof, tarnish-proof and nickel-free. Available in three sizes, they're perfect for travelling mums on the go. What's more, every sale helps fund ocean conservation projects. *To win a bangle, see page 69.*

Specifications

Gypsea Loop
gypsealoop.com
Cost RRP $119

Heaven scent

Reviewed by Eleanor Edstrom

If you've ever spent an evening swatting away an army of mozzies or sandflies, you'll know exactly how the tiny pests can turn a peaceful camping trip into a real-life version of *Survivor*. Thanks to its potent, long-lasting formula, Lemon Myrtle Fragrances' Natural Tropical Strength Mozzie & Sandfly Repellent keeps the little blighters at bay so you can focus on the fun stuff. Approved by the Australian Pesticide and Veterinary Management Authority, the DEET-free repellent is made with an organic oil base and is gentle on sensitive skin. Lasting up to four hours, it's an all-natural repellent perfect for kiddos who react badly to insect bites.

Lemon Myrtle Fragrances' products smell and feel so good, you'll want to use them even when there are no bugs about. And you can, thanks to the Aussie brand's Travel Care Collection. The self-care set includes handy 100ml sizes of body and hand wash, shampoo, conditioner, face moisturiser and hand and surface sanitiser. That means no more lugging around bulky bottles! I love that the products are cruelty-free and leave skin and hair feeling soft and squeaky clean.

That clean, fresh feeling extends to your living space too, with Lemon Myrtle Fragrances' Air Freshener, which does wonders for stuffy tents, musty caravans and smelly toilets. In just a few spritzes, the antibacterial and antifungal spray instantly refreshes any space with its zesty lemon fragrance. The icing on the cake? The air freshener doubles as an antimicrobial surface cleaner.

Specifications

Natural Tropical Strength Mozzie & Sandfly Repellent, RRP $22.95
Travel Care Collection, RRP $104
Air Freshener, RRP $17.95
lemonmyrtlefragrances.com.au

Lemon Myrtle Fragrances Australia
NATURAL LEMON MYRTLE™
Travel Care Collection
Body & Hand Wash
Shampoo
Conditioner
Face Moisturiser
Hand & Surface Sanitiser

Happy headwear

Reviewed by Catherine Best

I've tried many hats over the years – wide-brimmed, cap, visor, straw, cotton, polyester blend – and it's tricky finding a style that is comfortable, durable and offers optimum sun protection. I road-tested the ooGee Murray Fedora on a recent caravanning trip to Queensland, travelling from the dusty outback to the wet and salty climes of the far-north coast, and the hat held its own. Cool, stylish and – importantly – lightweight, the ooGee kept the sun off my face, ears and neck and wasn't cumbersome to wear, unlike some wide-brimmed styles.

Produced and designed in West Gosford, NSW, the ooGee Murray Fedora is made from pure wool felt, providing cool and comprehensive UPF50+ sun protection. The hats are moisture-wicking and unisex (not that I let the husband wear mine) and have an adjustable internal clasp for a snug and comfortable fit. The shape held up well on our travels, but the beige has lost its lustre. Dark camel might be a better colour choice for the outback.

Specifications

ooGee Murray Fedora
Cost RRP $139
oogee.com.au

Bootiful boots

Reviewed by Catherine Best

When did the humble gumboot become such a fashion statement? Merry People ankle boots have become de rigueur at campgrounds around the country for both adults and kids. I'd been itching to see what all the fuss was about, and now I get it. I tried the Merry People Bobbi Ankle Boot and can report they are ridiculously comfortable, versatile and keep feet dry in all manner of mud and slush. Tough enough for the bush and on-trend for brunch, Merry People boots come in five styles (plus clogs) and a range of fun, vibrant colours.

The boots were developed by Melbourne entrepreneur Danielle Pearce, who was frustrated by the lack of wet-weather footwear crossing the leisure-corporate divide. The brand has since found a market with the camping and footy-mum tribe. The Bobbi is made with a thick-grip rubber sole and has built-in arch support and a stretchy neoprene lining (the same material used in wetsuits). Easy to pull on and off, the boots are a regular fixture outside tents and caravan doors, with a size and colour to suit every member of the family.

Specifications

Merry People Bobbi Ankle Boot
Cost RRP $159.95
merrypeople.com

clean & pure
Coffee & Coconut

Planet-friendly lip balm

Reviewed by Catherine Best

Clean & Pure Go Plastic Free is a 100 per cent natural lip balm that comes in a biodegradable cardboard tube and packaging. Produced in Mandurah, WA, by husband-and-wife team Mark and Melanie Chapman, the lip balms are made with natural ingredients, including Manuka honey, organic cocoa butter and locally sourced beeswax and olive oil. There are five lip balms in the range, but my favourite is the Coffee & Coconut. Unlike traditional twist lip balms, the Go Plastic Free range is applied by gently pushing the inner cardboard tube up. It's easy and mess-free. We found these lip balms to be long-wearing and non-caking, and they even survived afternoons left in a hot backpack. *RRP $6.99 cleanandpure.com.au*

BUG BITE thing

Bug bites be gone

Reviewed by Catherine Best

The Bug Bite Thing is a smart and reusable suction device that takes the itch and swelling out of bites. It's ingenious in its simplicity: place the plastic tubular opening on a bite and draw the handles up like a syringe, hold for 20 seconds and release. We used the Bug Bite Thing on a summer beachside caravanning trip and my kids were hooked. It took the immediate itch (and whinge) out of their bites. *RRP $13.99 thebugbitething.com.au*

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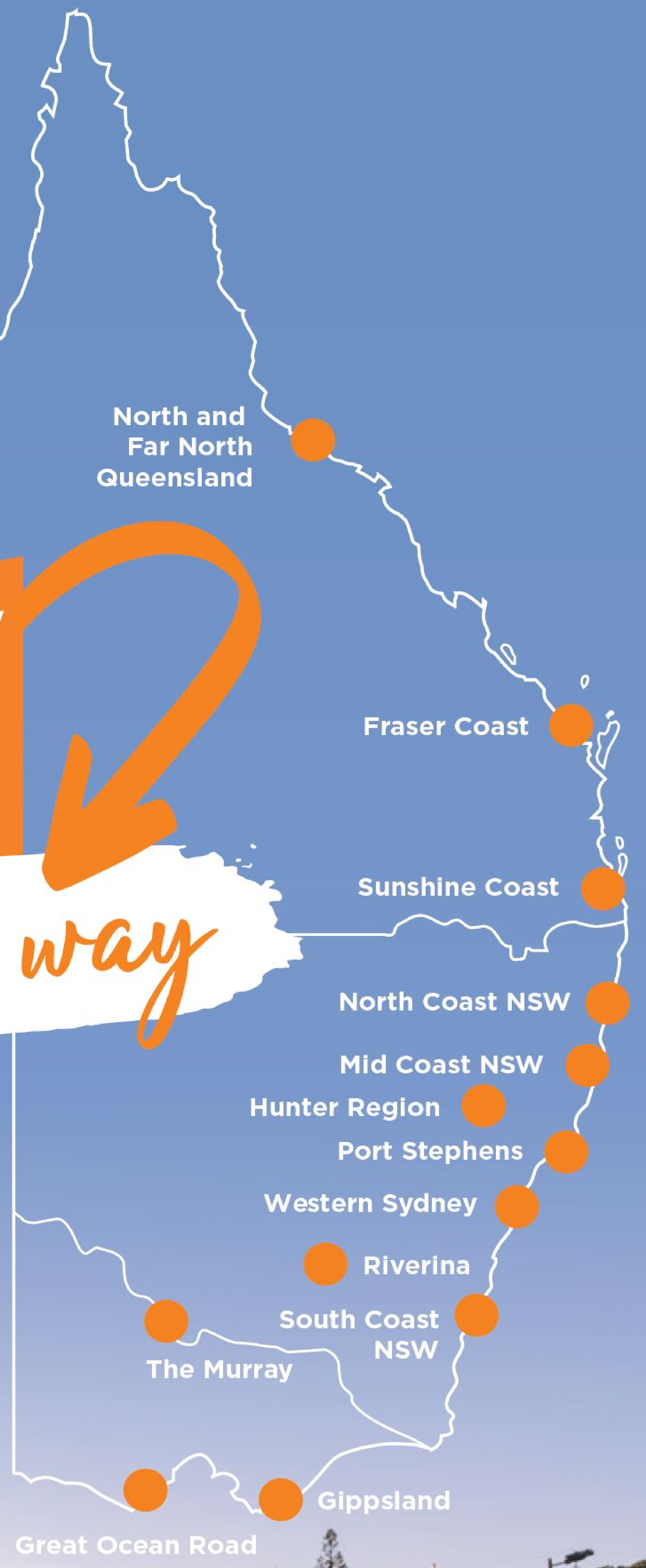
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